
July 21, 2008 - Rep. Slaughter Urges EPA To Release \$1 Million To Niagara County

FOR IMMEDIATE
RELEASE

Monday, July 21, 2008

Rep. Slaughter Urges EPA
To Release \$1 Million To Niagara
County

Funding Has Been Held Up For Nine Years By Administrative Delays

Niagara Falls, NY – Congresswoman Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY-28), Chairwoman of the House Committee on Rules, today urged the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to release a \$1 million grant to Niagara County.

The Brownfields grant was awarded to Niagara County in 1999. Administrative delays have held up the release of the funding, jeopardizing the County's ability to clean up contaminated industrial sites and spur economic development.

“It is unacceptable that after nine years this critical funding has still not been awarded,” said Rep. Slaughter. “Niagara County must receive this money before we needlessly lose the opportunity to complete key projects to clean-up our environment and jump-start our local economy.”

This is the second time this year that Rep. Slaughter has contacted the EPA about this funding. Early this year, the EPA threatened to rescind the grant award citing inaction by Niagara County. In March, Rep. Slaughter contacted the EPA to note Niagara County's diligence. Fortunately, with Rep. Slaughter's intervention, the EPA has decided not to rescind the grant award; however delays in allocating the funding persist.

BACKGROUND

The full text of Rep. Slaughter's letter to the Environmental Protection Agency is below.

The
Honorable Stephen Johnson

Administrator

U.S.
Environmental Protection Agency

Ariel Rios Building 1200

Pennsylvania Avenue

Washington, DC
20460

Dear Mr. Johnson,

For the second time this year, I am contacting the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to express my deep concern that ongoing EPA administrative delays are jeopardizing a \$1M Brownfields grant originally awarded to Niagara County,

New York in 1999. If the funding is not released to Niagara County In NiagaraCounty, which has suffered from an inordinate degree of deindustrialization, this funding is critical to help the region clean up contaminated industrial sites and reposition them for new economic development. Indeed, one project considered for financing under the revolving loan fund will leverage \$8 million in new private sector investment to create a scrap tire recycling facility by remediating an existing brownfield in the City of Niagara Falls' Highland Avenue corridor. expeditiously, the County will not be able to provide \$300,000 in grants to local governments and non-profit institutions and will not be able to fund a \$600,000 brownfield remediation revolving loan fund.

I first contacted the EPA about this matter in March of this year and called on the agency to abandon its then-plan to rescind this grant award. At the time the EPA mistakenly attributed the delays in issuing the award funding to supposed Niagara County inaction. However, the County had been diligent in responding to the EPA's requirements in order to execute the Cooperative Agreement with the EPA and receive the \$1 million grant allocation. Fortunately, while the EPA did abandon its plan, delays still persist.

Indeed, it seems that each time Niagara County satisfies the EPA's requirements, the County is apprised that it must meet yet another additional requirement. This most recently occurred in March when the EPA assured NiagaraCounty it would approve the Cooperative Agreement and allocate the funding by May 2008 after the County resubmitted new work plans and various other documents. But as of mid-July the Cooperative Agreement has not been approved. Instead, Niagara County was informed that the EPA Grants Office requires the EPA Region II Headquarters to complete a Non-Competitive, Non-Discretionary Funding Form which is then subject to a series of internal EPA approvals before it is received by the Grants Office. The County was informed that these additional steps will take at least two weeks to complete and that this must occur before the Region 2 Grants Office will start on the Cooperative Agreement.

It has been nearly nine years since the EPA announced it would award this grant to Niagara County and yet the funding has not been allocated. I request the EPA expeditiously process this grant award before we needlessly lose the opportunity to complete critical local economic development and environmental remediation projects. I appreciate your consideration of my request and look forward to your response. My Aide, Christopher Zeltmann, will be in touch with you shortly on the project's status, however, he may be reached by phone at 716-282-1274 or by mail at 1910 Pine Avenue, Niagara Falls, NY 14301.

Sincerely,

Louise M. Slaughter

Member of Congress

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