

November XX, 2017

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
U.S. Capitol Building, Room: S-230
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Hart Senate Office Building, Room: 322
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Paul D. Ryan
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
U.S. Capitol Building, Room: H-232
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Democratic Leader
United States House of Representatives
U.S. Capitol Building, Room: H-204
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Ryan, and Minority Leader Pelosi,

With 2017 quickly nearing an end, we ask that you uphold the federal commitment to local communities with significant percentages of federal land within our jurisdictions by fully funding the Payments In Lieu of Taxes program (PILT) for FY 2018, and reauthorizing the Secure Rural Schools program (SRS) until a permanent solution is developed. Sixty-two percent of counties in 49 states nationwide have untaxable federal land within our boundaries, and are required to provide critical services to residents and public lands visitors including search and rescue services, emergency management, law enforcement and education.

Payments In Lieu of Taxes

Nearly 1,900 counties, boroughs and parishes in 49 states rely on PILT to make up for lost property tax revenue from untaxable federal public lands. In FY 2017, Congress appropriated \$465 million to fully fund PILT, which local governments greatly appreciated. Unless Congress guarantees full funding for PILT for FY 2018, local governments will not be able to provide public services such as emergency management, law enforcement, education, healthcare and road maintenance. We therefore urge Congress to fully fund PILT for FY 2018 and eliminate the annual funding uncertainty faced by PILT counties in the long-term.

Secure Rural Schools

The SRS program provides over 720 counties and 4,000 school districts in 41 states with significant U.S. Forest Service lands with funding to make up for the shortfall resulting from declining timber sales off federal forestlands beginning in the early 1990s. SRS was last reauthorized retroactively for FY 2014 and FY 2015 with final payments going to counties and schools in spring 2016. Because Congress has not reauthorized SRS, local governments are scaling back after school programs, laying off teachers, cutting search and rescue services on federal lands, and are unable to construct or repair roads and other public infrastructure.

Additionally, if SRS is not reauthorized, it will also hurt those communities that receive PILT, as SRS payments will no longer be deducted under the PILT formula, spreading PILT across more localities. We urge Congress to reauthorize SRS as a bridge funding mechanism until a more permanent, sustainable solution is enacted.

Counties and our local communities need a strong federal partner to uphold the federal commitment from these programs to provide certainty at the local level. We look forward to working with Congress to solve the problems faced by federal lands communities.

Sincerely,

cc: U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
The Honorable John Cornyn, Majority Whip, U.S. Senate
The Honorable Richard Durbin, Minority Whip, U.S. Senate
The Honorable Kevin McCarthy, Majority Leader, U.S. House
The Honorable Steny Hoyer, Democratic Whip, U.S. House