[Date]

The Honorable [First Name] [Last Name]

United States [Senate/House of Representatives]

[Address Line 1]

[Address Line 2]

Dear [Senator/Congressman Last Name],

On behalf of the [Number] residents of [Name] County, I respectfully request you cosponsor S. 1027/H.R. 2340, bipartisan legislation to retroactively reauthorize the Secure Rural Schools (SRS) program for two years. The SRS program provides crucial support to forest counties, local schools, transportation infrastructure, law enforcement and other county services. Should Congress not reauthorize SRS, our county will face a budget shortfall that will impact our ability to provide essential services to residents and visitors. Today, I write to express my county’s concerns about SRS, which expired on September 30, 2015, including the need to reauthorize the program, as payments to forest counties and schools have not been distributed since March 2016.

[Name] County is just one of more than 720 counties nationwide receiving SRS funding, impacting nine million students in over 4,000 school districts across 41 states. SRS was first enacted in 2000 as local governments faced steep reductions in timber revenue sharing. For almost 100 years, the federal government has shared 25 percent of federal forest revenues with counties to compensate them for federal ownership of forest land that cannot be taxed at the local level. Although these lands are exempt from property taxes, county governments must still provide many essential services to millions of national forest visitors each year. Current revenue sharing payments are no longer sufficient to support the services forest counties must provide.

This year, the U.S. Forest Service began distributing permanently authorized “25 percent” payments to forest counties. These payments represent a nearly 80 percent reduction in payments to forest counties. When a similar situation occurred with the FY 2014 forest payments, the sudden decrease in forest payments for counties and school districts nationwide caused many to begin preparations to halt infrastructure projects, terminate employees, cancel teacher contracts and reduce numerous other critical local services. In that instance, Congress reauthorized the SRS program retroactively and provided full SRS payments to counties. However, in many cases the services had already been detrimentally impacted.

The SRS program continues to be a critical support system for forest counties as we work to diversify rural economies, improve forest health, strengthen historic forest revenue sharing with local governments and ensure our forests provide a range of values, such as clean water, jobs and wood fiber for local economies. I urge you to cosponsor S. 1027/H.R. 2340, and I stand ready to work with you in support of this important program.

Thank you for your continued service to [Name] County.

Sincerely,

[Name of Local Elected Official]

[County, State]