

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 28, 2018

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader, U.S. Senate
U.S. Capitol, S-230
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader, U.S. Senate
U.S. Capitol, S-221
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Schumer:

We strongly urge the inclusion of at least a one-year reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act (SRS), which enjoys tremendous bipartisan support, in any end-of-the-year legislation.

Historically, the federal government shared with county governments 25 percent of timber harvest revenues from federal Forest Service lands and 50 percent of timber harvest revenues from federal Oregon and California Grant Lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). These payments constituted a significant source of funding for rural, forested counties. However, due to declining timber sales, Congress first passed SRS in 2000 to provide a measure of compensation for counties containing tracts of federally owned forestlands that is tax-exempt.

Over the last nearly two decades, SRS has been a critical lifeline for over 775 counties in over 40 states across the country by helping fund more than 4,400 schools, road maintenance, law enforcement, and search and rescue operations. However, the most recent SRS reauthorization expired at the end of the last fiscal year, which means the last authorized payments to counties will go to participating states and counties in early calendar year 2019.

Congress has an obligation to ensure counties with swaths of tax-exempt forestlands can adequately provide essential services for their residents. Without the certainty of these critical safety-net payments, schools, libraries, and jails are closing. Schools that remain open will see a reduction of teachers. Roads go unpaved and become unsafe. Mental and physical health services are scaled back or even ended. Fewer and fewer law enforcement officers are forced to patrol larger and larger areas.

As we work to establish a permanent county payments solution, diversify rural economies, improve forest management and forest health, strengthen historic forest revenue sharing with local governments, and ensure that our forests provide a range of values such as clean water, jobs, and wood fiber for local economies, a short-term reauthorization of at least one year is critical to provide fiscal certainty for forested counties.

In the interest of working together in a bipartisan way to support local rural communities, we ask that you include a reauthorization of Secure Rural schools in any end-of-the-year package. We appreciate your assistance with this matter.

Sincerely,



Mike Crapo
United States Senator



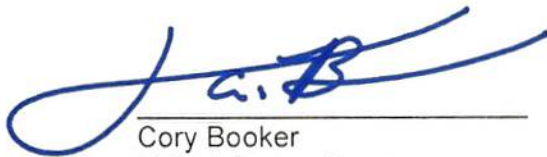
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Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



Cory Booker
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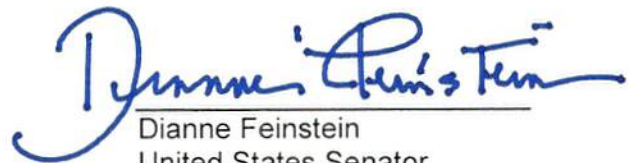
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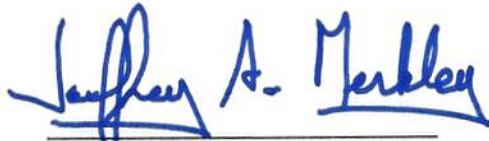
Martin Heinrich
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Amy Klobuchar
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Joe Manchin III
United States Senator



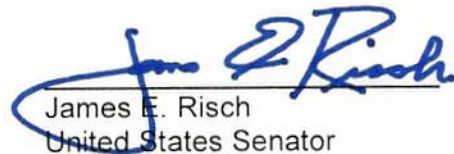
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Patty Murray
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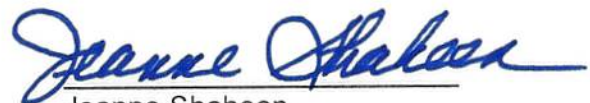
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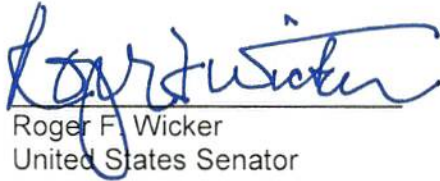
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