

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 22, 2019

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Minority Leader McCarthy:

We strongly urge the inclusion of at least a two-year reauthorization of Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) and the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act (SRS) -- two programs that enjoy tremendous bipartisan support -- in any end-of-the-year legislation.

For over two decades, SRS has been a critical lifeline to over 775 counties in more than 40 states by helping fund over 4,400 schools, road maintenance, law enforcement, and search and rescue operations on federal lands. Historically, the federal government shared with county governments 25 percent of timber sales from federal forestlands and 50 percent of revenues from certain lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management. Due to declining timber sales and county revenues, Congress first passed SRS in 2000 to provide a measure of compensation for counties containing federal timberland. SRS expired at the end of fiscal year 2018, with the final payments distributed to county governments early in calendar year 2019.

Additionally, because the federal government does not pay local property taxes, rural counties containing large swaths of federal lands cannot collect this critical revenue source and are routinely forced to make difficult financial decisions. Since 1976, nearly 1,900 counties across 49 states have relied on PILT to provide essential county services like law enforcement, jails, mental health programs, and libraries. PILT will expire at the end of fiscal year 2019, with final payments distributed to county governments earlier this year. We appreciate the work of the Appropriations Committee to include full funding for PILT in their fiscal year 2020 Interior and Environment legislation recently reported to the full Senate with unanimous support, and urge its swift consideration before the full Senate.

Congress has an obligation to ensure counties with large swaths of federally-owned, tax-exempt forests and rangelands can adequately provide essential services for their residents. As history has proven, without the certainty of these two critical programs, schools, libraries, and jails will close. The services counties continue to provide will see a reduction in staffing and resources. Roads will go unpaved and become unsafe. Mental health and physical health services will be scaled back and, in some cases, even ended. Fewer and fewer law enforcement officers will be forced to patrol larger and larger areas.

As we work to establish a permanent county payments solution, diversify rural economies, and improve forest management and forest health, a short-term reauthorization of at least two years is critical to provide fiscal certainty for counties containing federally-owned lands.

In the interest of working together in a bipartisan way to support rural communities, we ask that you include at least a two-year reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools and Payments in Lieu of Taxes programs in any end-of-the-year funding package. We appreciate your assistance and look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,



Peter A. DeFazio
Member of Congress



Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Member of Congress


Mark Amodei
Member of Congress


Andy Barr
Member of Congress


Jack Bergman
Member of Congress


Suzanne Bonamici
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Anthony Brindisi
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Julia Brownley
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Salud Carbajal
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Liz Cheney
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Jennifer Wexton
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TJ Cox

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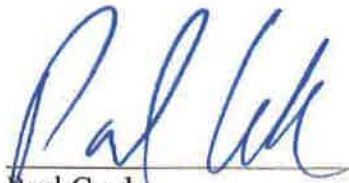
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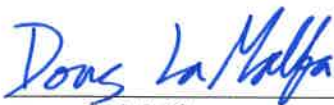
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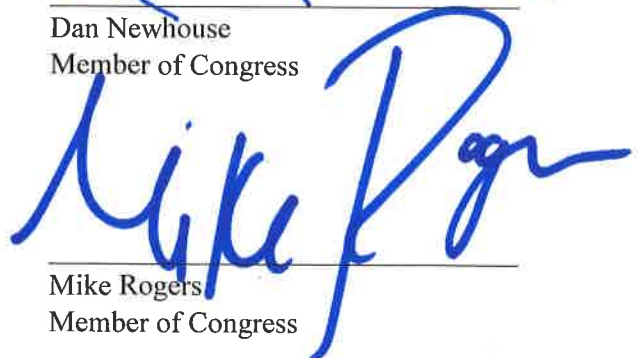
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Kurt Schrader
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