

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

[[DATE]]

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
House Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Johnson and Minority Leader Jeffries,

With broad bipartisan support in both chambers, we urge swift consideration of S.356, the Secure Rural Schools (SRS) Reauthorization Act of 2025. On June 18, 2025, the Senate unanimously passed this bipartisan legislation, which is co-sponsored by 27 U.S. Senators, and companion legislation (H.R. 1383) is co-sponsored by 75 Members of Congress. We request prompt action to advance this measure in an end of year vehicle or as a standalone bill, to uphold the federal government’s responsibility to communities impacted by federal land ownership.

Since 1908, federal law has required the U.S. Forest Service to share 25 percent of revenue generated on federal land with local governments for “public schools and public roads of the county or counties in which the forest reserve is situated.”¹ For decades, timber sales were the largest source of revenue for local jurisdictions in these areas. However, as revenues declined, this created unexpected and prolonged fiscal challenges for local governments home to untaxed National Forest lands. In response, Congress enacted the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000, giving counties the option to receive SRS payments to support public services like road maintenance, infrastructure, education, wildfire mitigation, and other efforts to address public safety. Congress has consistently reauthorized these payments with overwhelming bipartisan support, with the most recent reauthorization expiring at the end of Fiscal Year (FY) 2023.

In FY 2023, the SRS program provided \$281 million to more than 700 counties across 41 states supporting rural communities across Republican and Democratic districts, underscoring the program’s broad, bipartisan importance to local governments that are home to federally managed land. However, following the program's expiration at the end of FY 2023, counties and school districts across 41 states have seen a 63 percent cut in funding.² This \$177 million loss is devastating for rural communities, leading to school closures, delayed road and bridge maintenance, and reduced public safety services. These are not abstract policy debates; they are tangible consequences for local governments and the communities that steward untaxed federal lands. Failing to reauthorize the SRS program also jeopardizes the critical Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) program, which provides federal assistance for local governments home to large amounts of U.S. Department of Interior lands.

We urge the U.S. House of Representatives to advance S.356 for immediate consideration as a standalone measure or as part of a broader end of year legislative funding vehicle. Rural counties, parishes, and boroughs across the country are already facing the impact of the program’s expiration. The SRS program underscores the vital partnership between federal land management and local government services, supporting everything from wildfire mitigation and forest health to the maintenance of roads and support of public schools. With longstanding and strong bipartisan support behind SRS, Congress must reaffirm its commitment to these rural counties.

¹ 16 U.S.C. § 500 (1908).

² National Association of Counties, “Primer for Counties: Payments in Lieu of Taxes and Secure Rural Schools Program,” 2025.

The undersigned stand ready to work with leadership in both chambers and from both parties to ensure that SRS reauthorization moves forward in any viable legislative vehicle before the end of this year.

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[[SIGNATURES]]

Cc: The Honorable John Thune, U.S. Senate Majority Leader
 The Honorable Chuck Shummer, U.S. Senate Minority Leader
 The Honorable Susan Collins, Chair, U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
 The Honorable Patty Murray, Vice Chair, U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
 The Honorable Steve Scalise, Majority Leader, U.S. House of Representatives
 The Honorable Katherine Clark, Minority Whip, U.S. House of Representatives
 The Honorable Tom Cole, Chair, U.S. House Committee on Appropriations
 The Honorable Rosa DeLauro, Ranking Member, U.S. House Committee on Appropriations