



Senator Joe Manchin, Chairman
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
U.S. Senate
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Senator John Barrasso, Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
U.S. Senate
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

November 15, 2023

Dear Senators,

On behalf of AASA, The School Superintendents Association, the Association of Educational Service Agencies, the National Rural Education Association and the National Rural Education Advocacy Consortium, I write to express our support for the Secure Rural Schools (SRS) Reauthorization Act of 2023 (S 2581), ahead of tomorrow's markup.

Over the last 30 years, due to changes in federal forest policy and declining timber sales, revenues that have historically enabled SRS counties to share in revenues generated from national forests have fallen dramatically. Congress, recognizing the urgent need at the beginning of this century, passed SRS in 2000. SRS funds essential education, transportation and public safety programs critical to rural forest counties, communities and schools. Rural communities rely on SRS to offset lost tax revenue from lands transferred to federal ownership. This act provided a solution to the forest county education funding crisis by providing a predictable payment to those counties impacted by federally-impacted forest counties.

For many rural counties once dependent on timber revenue, SRS payments are the lifeblood of local schools and communities, helping them avoid school closures, teacher and public employee layoffs, library closures, and reduced mental health services. The steady decline of these funds significantly impacts the ability of rural counties, forcing eliminations of education jobs, academic programming and extracurricular activities. Beyond the impact on schools, SRS has also allowed rural county road departments to address their severe maintenance backlog.

These schools need a sustainable solution that supports economic recovery and development. The expiration of SRS after FY 2023 puts in doubt the ability for rural forest communities to provide the local emergency and education services necessary to deal with these realities. When Congress fails to support SRS, rural schools, communities and counties find themselves facing significant cuts, cuts that are often put into place immediately. Absent adequate SRS support, these rural communities are forced to cut programs supporting essential safety, fire, police, road and bridge, community and education services.

We strongly support your efforts for the short- and long-term reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools program. We ask you to support S. 2581 to provide short term SRS reauthorization and funding for Fiscal Years 2024-2026 to support essential education, safety, fire, police, road, bridge, and community services that are at risk in our forest communities.

Sincerely,

Noelle Ellerson Ng
Associate Executive Director, Advocacy & Governance
AASA, The School Superintendents Association