

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 1, 2019

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

The Honorable Chuck 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 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.

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.

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.

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 proved, 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, improve forest management and forest health, strengthen historic forest revenue sharing with local governments, and ensure that our public lands provide a range of values such as clean water, jobs, grazing opportunities, and wood fiber for local economies, a short-term

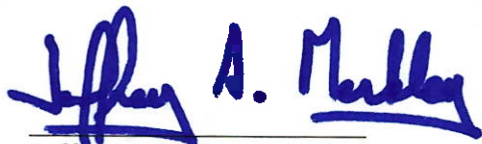
reauthorization of at least two years is critical to provide fiscal certainty for counties containing federally-owned lands.

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

Sincerely,

Ron Wyden
United States Senator

James E. Risch
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

Mike Crapo
United States Senator

Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator

Cory Gardner
United States Senator

Jacky Rosen
United States Senator



Dan Sullivan
United States Senator

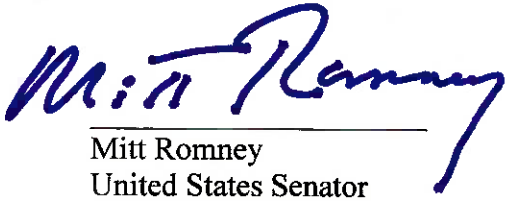
Tom Udall
United States Senator

Steve Daines
United States Senator

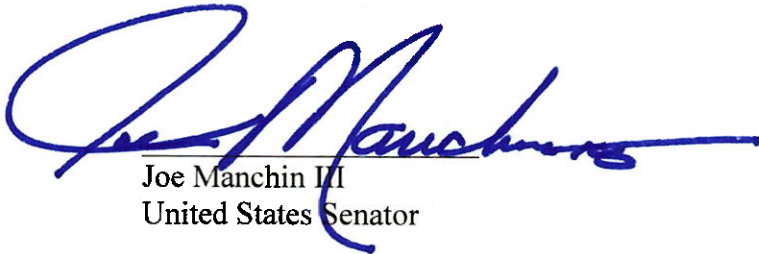
Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator

Roger F. Wicker
United States Senator

Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator

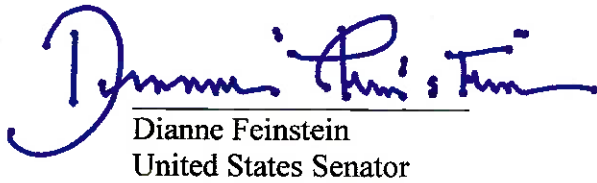


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United States Senator



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United States Senator

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