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ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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Sponsor Statement House Joint Resolution No. 5

House Joint Resolution 5 (HJR 5) urges the United States Congress and the President of the United States to reinstate the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000 (the “Act”) and to make its funding mechanism permanent. The Secure Rural Schools program has been a vital funding source for rural communities in Alaska, helping to sustain critical public services, including education, road maintenance, emergency response, and public safety.

The Act was originally enacted to offset significant revenue losses resulting from changes in federal land management policies that dramatically reduced timber harvesting on federal lands. These payments have provided a financial lifeline to municipalities, boroughs, and regional educational attendance areas (REAs) across Alaska, ensuring that rural communities can maintain essential services. In fiscal year 2023, the program provided \$12.6 million to twenty municipalities in Alaska: Hydaburg, Klawock, Kake, Craig, Pelican, Yakutat, Wrangell, Hoonah, Gustavus, Cordova, Petersburg, Valdez, Haines, Ketchikan, Sitka, Juneau, Skagway, Anchorage, the Kenai Peninsula Borough, and the Mat-Su Borough.

However, as of January 2025, the SRS program expired due to the U.S. House of Representatives' failure to approve reauthorization legislation. Without this funding, many rural communities face severe budget shortfalls, which could result in school budget cuts, reduced public safety funding, and deteriorating infrastructure.

HJR 5 strongly urges Congress to act immediately to reinstate the Secure Rural Schools program and to retroactively provide funding for fiscal year 2025 and beyond. Furthermore, the resolution advocates for a permanent funding mechanism, ensuring long-term stability for rural communities that rely on this program. Without congressional action, many communities will be left struggling to bridge the financial gaps created by the expiration of this program.

It is imperative that Congress recommits to supporting rural America by reauthorizing and securing stable, predictable funding for communities that depend on the Secure Rural Schools program. HJR 5 sends a clear message that Alaska stands united in urging Congress and the President to prioritize the needs of rural communities and ensure they have the resources necessary to thrive. For these reasons, I urge my colleagues to support HJR 5.