



January 21, 2025

Honorable Senator Murkowski
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Senator Sullivan
302 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Representative Begich
153 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Murkowski, Senator Sullivan, and Representative Begich,

On behalf of the 3,367 residents in the Petersburg Borough in Alaska, we urge the reauthorization of the *Secure Rural Schools Reauthorization Act of 2023*, extending it through 2026 and ensuring that local governments in forested counties continue to have a crucial reliable funding stream.

The SRS program provides critical funding to national forest counties to finance numerous critical services, including infrastructure, conservation projects, search and rescue missions, fire prevention programs and education services. In Petersburg, we rely on SRS funds to maintain high quality education services in our local schools and to maintain our road system. If Congress fails to renew its long-standing federal obligation to forest counties and the lands managed by the federal government by not reauthorizing the SRS program, the Petersburg Borough and over 700 similar counties across the United States would face dramatic budgetary shortfalls. Authorization for SRS last lapsed in FY 2016 and as a result federal forest payments to counties decreased by over 80 percent.

Historically, rural counties have relied on a share of receipts from local timber harvests to supplement local funding for education services and roads. During the 1980s, national policies substantially diminished the revenue-generating activity permitted on these forests. The resulting steep decline in timber sales decreased the revenues that rural counties and school districts received from forest management activities. In response to this decline, SRS was first enacted in 2000 to stabilize payments to counties and compensate for lost revenues.

SRS was last reauthorized on February 15, 2021, for FYs 2021 through 2023. In April 2023, the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management distributed \$270 million to over 700 counties, parishes and boroughs. In April 2024, the U.S. Forest Service announced \$232 million in SRS funds to be distributed to counties. Ensuring these funds continue to be distributed to federal forest counties will allow counties to fund essential government services fully – those mandated by federal and state laws – such as education, emergency services, transportation infrastructure and law enforcement.

Thank you for your continued service to the Petersburg Borough and our residents. We appreciate your partnership and respectfully ask that you swiftly reauthorize the Secure Rural School program through 2026.

Respectfully,

Mark Jensen, Mayor
Petersburg Borough, Alaska