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RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

Growing Alaska Through Responsible Resource Development

March 15, 2017

Senator Cathy Giessel
Alaska State Capitol

Via email

Re: SB 88, *Authorizes land exchange between the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority and the U.S. Forest Service*

Dear Senator Giessel:

The Resource Development Council for Alaska, Inc. (RDC) is writing to support SB 88, which authorizes a land exchange between the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (the Trust) and the U.S. Forest Service. The exchange is vital to the survival of Southeast Alaska's last remaining mid-size sawmill and would serve as a bridge until 2020 when additional federal timber comes online.

RDC is a statewide business association comprised of individuals and companies from Alaska's oil and gas, mining, forest products, tourism and fisheries industries. RDC's membership includes Alaska Native Corporations, local communities, organized labor, and industry support firms. RDC's purpose is to encourage a strong, diversified private sector in Alaska and expand the state's economic base through the responsible development of our natural resources.

The Forest Service manages more than 90 percent of the commercial timber base in Southeast Alaska, but it has fallen well short of its target for supplying timber to the industry. The State has provided some timber to the industry, but with only two percent of the commercial base in the region, it alone cannot supply the timber required to keep the last surviving sawmill in operation.

The proposed land exchange has widespread community support in Southeast Alaska. The exchange would allow the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority to avoid harvesting timber on land adjacent to both Ketchikan and Petersburg that local communities would like preserved. By exchanging Trust lands for lands of equal value from the Forest Service, the Trust will gain land that can be harvested, which in turn would provide revenue to support important mental health programs for Alaskans.

The proposed exchange is a win-win for Alaska as it will increase revenue for mental health programs, help sustain our struggling timber industry, save jobs, and preserve land adjacent to local communities. RDC urges passage of SB 88 this session.

Sincerely,

Carl Portman
Deputy Director