



March 19, 2018

Co-Chairs Seaton and Foster, and Members of the House Finance Committee:

My name is Dr. Mary Wegner, and I am the superintendent of the Sitka School District. I am testifying today in support of HJR 29, Reauthorize Secure Rural Schools Act.

Thank you for your consideration of advancing support for the reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000. Secure Rural Schools funding is critically important to the Sitka School District, as well as many other school districts around Alaska. The Sitka School District resides in the Sitka Borough of which 95% is comprised of Tongass National Forest. Around Alaska local municipalities have a limited ability to generate local tax revenue to support schools and roads due to the surrounding national forests, which is why it is so imperative that this act is immediately reauthorized and funded. The loss of Secure Rural Schools funding places an onerous burden upon our local citizenry, and federal assistance is appropriate compensation for the surrounding federal land.

In your advocacy on behalf of the reauthorization of Secure Rural Schools, please seek a long-term reauthorization of the legislation, as failure to do so has the potential to wreak long-term damage on public education in Sitka and in communities across the state and nation. The limits imposed by national forests are a reality every year, which is why authorization is critical every year. This issue is so pressing to us in Sitka that on February 6, 2018 the Sitka School Board passed a resolution in support of HJR 29.

Having Secure Rural Schools funding as a revenue source in the Sitka School District's FY19 budget would greatly help to save teacher jobs. Providing an excellent education to every student every day requires quality teachers combined with a culturally responsive learning environment with targeted instruction to meet a student's individual learning needs. All of which helps us to live the three commitments of Alaska's Education Challenge, which are increasing student success, cultivating safety and well-being, and supporting responsible and reflective learners. In Sitka we are facing a budget deficit that is 12% of our total general fund budget, and we need this federal funding to keep our talented teachers.

Thank you for taking my testimony, and thank you for your commitment to public education in Alaska. I hope you will urge the U.S. Congress to reauthorize the Secure Rural Schools Act.

Sincerely,

Mary Wegner, Ed.D.