

# ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

*Interim:*  
P.O. Box 109  
Wrangell, AK 99929  
Phone: (907) 874-3088  
Fax: (907) 874-3055



*Session:*  
State Capitol, Room 406  
Juneau, AK 99801-1182  
Phone: (907) 465-3824  
1-800-686-3824  
Fax: (907) 465-3175

## REPRESENTATIVE PEGGY WILSON HOUSE DISTRICT 2

### SPONSOR STATEMENT House Joint Resolution 24

#### **“Urging the United States Congress to reauthorize the Secure Rural Schools and Communities Self-Determination Act of 2000”**

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HJR 24 urges the President and the United States Congress to authorize a secure and sustained funding mechanism to support public education in Alaska.

In 1908, the federal government established the National Forest Receipts Program, which provided support for schools and roads in America's rural communities - those that were surrounded by the newly created National Forests. Congress recognized the fact that communities located in these areas would be deprived of opportunities for economic development and much-needed tax revenues that would otherwise be possible if the land were privately owned. Through this program, 25% of the annual income earned from activities within a national forest was shared with the states for distribution to the boroughs and cities located within the national forest.

In 1999, Congress recognized the adverse consequences of recent legislation that resulted in declining timber sales and significantly declining revenues to rural communities. The 2000 Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act (SRSCA) was created to provide annual safety-net payments to support rural schools and roads, based on historic timber revenue levels between 1986 and 1999.

The situation in these rural communities has not changed. They are still surrounded by national forests rather than privately-owned land, and still not able to collect taxes from private enterprises on those forest lands. However, the agreement from the federal government is about to sunset. Payments from the Secure Rural Schools Act have declined each year, by design, and the Act is scheduled to end in September 2011.

Many of Alaska's rural communities are surrounded by either the Tongass National Forest or the Chugach National Forest, making them highly dependent on the federal government for continued support for roads and schools. This Resolution urges the United States President and the United States Congress to sign into law a long-term authorization of the Secure Rural Schools and Communities Self-Determination Act.