

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 5, 2025

8:02 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Rebecca Himschoot, Co-Chair  
Representative Andi Story, Co-Chair  
Representative Maxine Dibert  
Representative Ted Eischeid  
Representative Jubilee Underwood  
Representative Rebecca Schwanke  
Representative Bill Elam

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 5

Urging the United States Congress and the President of the United States to reinstate the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000 and make the funding mechanism in the Act permanent.

- HEARD & HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: HJR 5

SHORT TITLE: SECURE RURAL SCHOOLS PROGRAM

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) BYNUM

01/22/25	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/25	(H)	EDC
02/05/25	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106

**WITNESS REGISTER**

REPRESENTATIVE JEREMY BYNUM  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** As prime sponsor, introduced HJR 5 to the committee

TREVOR SHAW, Staff  
Representative Jeremy Bynum  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** On behalf of Representative Jeremy Bynum, prime sponsor, presented HJR 5 to the committee

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

[8:02:25 AM](#)

**CO-CHAIR STORY** called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:02 a.m. Representatives Story, Himschoot, Underwood, Elam, Eischeid, Dibert, and Schwanke were present at the call to order.

**HJR 5-SECURE RURAL SCHOOLS PROGRAM**

[8:03:22 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY announced that the only order of business would be HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 5, "Urging the United States Congress and the President of the United States to reinstate the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000 and make the funding mechanism in the Act permanent."

[8:04:18 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JEREMY BYNUM, Alaska State Legislature, As prime sponsor, introduced HJR 5 to the committee. He said that the Secure Rural Schools Act of 2000 (SRS) was something that his local government depended upon and emphasized the importance of SRS funding to rural school districts in Alaska.

[8:05:20 AM](#)

TREVOR SHAW, Staff, Representative Jeremy Bynum, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of Representative Jeremy Bynum, prime sponsor, presented HJR 5 to the committee. He began on slide 2 of the PowerPoint presentation for HJR 5 [included in the committee packet], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Urging the United States Congress and the President of the United States to reinstate the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of

2000 and make the funding mechanism in the Act permanent.

The Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000 ("SRS Act") was enacted by the U.S. Congress to provide financial assistance to rural counties and school districts impacted by the sharp reduction of revenue from timber sales on federal lands and National Forests.

[8:06:09 AM](#)

MR. SHAW continued to slide 3, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Historically, a portion of Forest Service funds generated through multi-use activities, such as grazing, timber production, and special use permits, were distributed to eligible counties to help maintain local roads and schools. However, with the significant decline of the timber industry in the 1990s, lawmakers sought to provide relief to local communities and economies through an alternative funding mechanism.

In Fiscal Year 2023, forest counties across the United States received \$252.6 million in payments under the SRS Act, including \$10.9 million for communities in the State of Alaska.

[8:07:00 AM](#) SLIDE 4

MR. SHAW continued to slide 4, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

FY2023 SRS Act Payments in Alaska

- Anchorage: \$92,404.67
- Haines: \$272,886.54
- Juneau: \$629,713.94
- Kenai: \$604,468.39
- Ketchikan:  
\$1,194,087.61
- Mat-Su: \$22,365.14
- Petersburg: \$764,911.32
- Sitka: \$606,023.02
- Skagway: \$37,927.48
- Wrangell: \$888,492.07
- Yakutat: \$595,621.47

Unorganized: \$5,229,332.69 (Chugach & Tongass National Forests)

[8:07:39 AM](#)

MR. SHAW continued to slide 5, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

In the Ketchikan Gateway Borough, SRS payments go to the Local Education Fund, which is primarily funded through property taxes - the mill rate % equivalent of the SRS payment is 14%, or 10% of their total local contribution to schools.

In the City & Borough of Wrangell, SRS payments accounted for approximately 55% of their local contribution to the school district.

In the Petersburg Borough, SRS payments were equal to approximately 38% of their school funding contribution.

In the City & Borough of Yakutat, SRS payments were roughly equal to the total amount in local contribution to their school district in FY23.

[8:08:35 AM](#)

MR. SHAW continued to slide 6, which displayed a bar graph that compared the SRS funding differences in various Southeast Alaska communities, along with its dollar impact per student.

[8:09:32 AM](#)

MR. SHAW continued to slide 7, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

SRS Act funding was reauthorized in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act through September 30, 2023.

The Secure Rural Schools Reauthorization Act of 2023 (S.2581) was introduced to extend the SRS Act funding mechanism through 2026. This bill passed the U.S. Senate by unanimous consent. However, it died without being heard by the House upon the adjournment of the 118th Congress.

The last SRS payments under the most recent reauthorization were distributed to states in April 2024.

□ Without Congressional action, there will be no further payments to communities under SRS. Currently, no reauthorizing legislation has been introduced in the 119th Congress.

[8:10:41 AM](#)

MR. SHAW continued to slide 8, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

House Joint Resolution No. 5 urges the United States Congress and President to reinstate this source of critical revenue for Alaska forest communities, and to go one step further by creating a permanent funding mechanism according to the existing SRS Act formula. Removing the uncertainty of these stop-gap reauthorizations would provide stability and predictability to these affected communities across the nation, especially the small rural communities that are disproportionately impacted by these lapses in funding.

[8:11:19 AM](#)

MR. SHAW concluded the presentation on slide 9 and offered to answer any committee questions.

[8:11:34 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ELAM asked if SRS funding was in lieu of funding that would have been generated by a local timber industry.

[8:11:58 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BYNUM said that the federal funding was generally made up of the funds that would have come from timber harvest.

[8:13:25 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCHWANKE asked if the SRS was similar to the Payment in Lieu of Taxes program (PILT) that rural schools in her own district are subject to. She commented that she would like to see the Tongass National Forest reopened for logging.

REPRESENTATIVE BYNUM replied that he would have to do more research on PILT to properly compare the two programs.

[8:16:24 AM](#)

MR. SHAW clarified to the committee that the Secure Rural Schools formula was originally created to offset the loss of timber income and provide relief to communities that were affected by their local timber industries leaving.

[8:17:32 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE UNDERWOOD asked if the Secure Rural Schools act would have to be reversed if the Tongass National Forest were allowed to be logged again.

MR. SHAW echoed Representative Underwood's remarks and said that Alaskans would "love to use" their natural resources.

[8:18:15 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EISCHEID asked how school districts around Southeast Alaska would be impacted by the Secure Rural Schools Act not being reauthorized.

REPRESENTATIVE BYNUM explained that the impact of a loss of SRS funding that a community might experience is directly correlated to the size of a community.

[8:21:17 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EISCHEID emphasized Representative Bynum's remarks that the impact of reduced or no SRS funding would have tremendous impacts on communities around the United States and Alaska.

[8:22:00 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE UNDERWOOD asked Representative Bynum if he has had any conversations with Alaska's congressional delegation regarding HJR 5.

REPRESENTATIVE BYNUM replied that his office has been in contact with Alaska's congressional delegation and said that he doesn't want to make any remarks on their behalf while he awaits their responses.

[8:22:30 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT asked if there have historically been any gaps in the Secure Rural Schools funds and asked what the breakdown of fund usage is for the SRS program. She asked how difficult it would be to convince Alaska's congressional delegation or the President of the United States to pass a new SRS act.

MR. SHAW answered that this would be the first time in the history of the SRS Program that there would be a lapse in funding. He said that the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act was an example of a law that allowed a community to use all funds from SRS funding. He added that Yakutat, Alaska is a prime example of a community that would be greatly affected by the loss of the SRS program.

[8:26:19 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY asked how the SRS could change to become permanent law and asked if the current legislation being proposed before the United States Congress has a sunset clause.

REPRESENTATIVE BYNUM said that a new piece of legislation would have to not include a sunset clause in order for it to become permanent law.

[8:27:45 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY pointed out that there were 4 letters of support from the Wrangell, Ketchikan, Yakutat, and Juneau school districts.

[8:28:17 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY announced that HJR 5 would be held over.

[8:28:37 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY thanked the invited testifiers and delivered committee announcements.

[8:30:03 AM](#)

## **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 8:30 a.m.