



National Forest Counties and Schools Coalition

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Hello everyone,

In the last three weeks, as a culminating effort to an ongoing push to hold Congress accountable for providing funding for schools and communities left underfunded because of federal foresting policy, our coalition pushed for the inclusion of funding for the Secure Rural Schools Act (SRS) within the Continuing Resolution (CR) appropriations bill. Our coalition was founded on the premise of advocating for continued authorization and funding to provide critical resources to schools and communities impacted by the presence of federal land. With the current political landscape eliminating the possibility of a comprehensive reauthorization of the program, our focus was, and remains, securing funding for our schools and communities, all of whom opened the 2016-17 school year with ZERO funding from the SRS program.

Following a concerted effort during the August recess to help Congress better understand their responsibility in supporting this program, our board returned to DC to push for the funding to be included in the CR. Our effort on behalf of the 9 million students in our schools and counties—was an intense personal and professional effort, and we remain indebted to all those who participated. The in-person advocacy helped to bring the program to life. You helped breathe life into Congressional understanding of the reality of what the loss of SRS means to our schools and counties. It was powerful.

While our most recent effort did not quite secure the funding we need, it must be noted that unlike previous meetings, including those as recent as August, we received a universal acknowledgement that this program matters and that Congress needs to meet its commitment. All that is left to do now is to push Congress to get their actions to match their words. We greatly appreciate the support we received from numerous Senators, House Members and staff. We knew we were fighting an uphill battle when Congress decided against any type of a more comprehensive omnibus spending bill. That left only a narrow choice of getting into the CR in a very short time line. In the end, SRS and forest management were not included in the CR, and our efforts will have to carry through the holiday recess and into the new year and new Congress.

At the heart of our effort is this simple reality: Children are not responsible for the change in policy 30 years ago that so impacts communities with federal forest land. Children are not responsible for Congress' continued inaction now. But, children are the ones to pay the price when Congress can/will not work together to honor its commitment. This reality plays to the politics of a broader game, comprehensive reauthorization, while leaving students and communities to be caught in the middle. It is our nation's rural schools and communities that pay the price of continued Congressional inaction.

What are our next steps? Now, more than ever, we have to remain focused on our goal: immediate funding for SRS and continued efforts to lay the groundwork for a complete reauthorization. The Coalition will be returning to DC in January to continue our work with the new 115th Congress and the incoming Trump Administration for reauthorization and retroactive funding. We are not done fighting. We thank the Senators, Representatives, and Senate and House staff members who supported and encouraged our efforts to preserve our schools and communities. We will work together with them and you to renew our effort. And most importantly, we thank the members and partners of our broader coalition for your continued work, both in our schools and with members of Congress, to ensure the longevity of this program.

Please continue to talk with your Senators and Members of Congress about what the loss of SRS will mean to your students and to your county and communities while they are home for the Holiday season.

Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,



Kermith R. Walters
President