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Senator Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader, U.S. Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Representative Paul Ryan
Speaker, U.S. House of Representatives
1233 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Senator Charles Schumer
Minority Leader, U.S. Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Representative Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader, U.S. House of Representatives
235 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

March 1, 2018

Dear Senator McConnell, Senator Schumer, Representative Ryan, and Representative Pelosi:

On behalf of AASA, The School Superintendents, representing more than 13,000 public school system leaders across the nation, I write to request immediate action to include funding for the Secure Rural Schools/Forest Counties (SRS) program in any final federal fiscal year 2018 (FY18) omnibus funding bill. Failure to act is a deliberate decision to continue to ignore the 9 million students in 4,400 school districts in 775 forest counties in 41 states served by the SRS program.

We were disappointed that when Congress did provide additional hurricane aid and funded other programs, they did not fund Secure Rural Schools. Congress made a longstanding commitment to rural students and communities when it passed and extended Secure Rural Schools and Communities Self Determination Act of 2000. The commitment was upheld until Congress stopped funding SRS after FY15. Secure Rural Schools funds essential education, transportation and public safety programs critical to rural forest counties, communities and schools. Rural communities rely on SRS to offset lost tax revenue from lands transferred to federal ownership. Without SRS the lost tax revenue remains unavailable without economic alternatives even as the lands remain federally owned. In the meantime, Congress fails to fund SRS and is unable to adopt forest management policies to help restore economic stability in the rural forest communities.

When Congress failed to adequately fund SRS, rural schools, communities and counties found themselves facing significant cuts, as the program reverted to a timber receipt funding formula that originated over 100 years ago. Absent adequate SRS support, these rural communities are forced to cut programs supporting essential safety, fire, police, road and bridge, community and education services.

The time to act is now. As Congress completes its final negotiations on a FY18 Omnibus Appropriations package, it is critically important the package include SRS funding. Immediate SRS funding is needed for FY 2016-FY 2017 to support essential safety, fire, police, road and bridge, and education services.

Thank you for this consideration. We look forward to supporting your work to finally address the important Secure Rural Schools issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Noelle Ellerson Ng". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Noelle Ellerson Ng
Associate Executive Director

CC: U.S. Senate
U.S. House of Representatives