

RESOLUTION #2020-10

Supporting reform of the USDA Forest Service Secure Rural Schools program to include long-term certainty and sustainability of funding.

WHEREAS, A March 2017 Report by the Congressional Research Service confirmed 61% of all land (224.2 Million Acres) in Alaska is owned by the federal government; 57% (129 Million Acres) of which is managed by agencies with preservation and conservation of land as core mission components, and will likely never be available for development; and

WHEREAS, the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act (SRS) was enacted in 2000 to financially assist counties with public, tax-exempt forestlands; and

WHEREAS, critical services at the county level have historically been funded in part with a 25 percent share of timber receipts from federal U.S. Forest Service lands and a 50 percent share of timber receipts from federal Oregon and California Grant Lands managed by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management; and

WHEREAS, as those revenues have fallen or fluctuated due to reduced timber harvest and market forces, SRS payments helped bridge the gap to keep rural schools open, provide road maintenance, support search and rescue efforts and other essential county services; and

WHEREAS, since enacted in 2000, SRS has provided a total of \$7 billion in payments to more than 700 counties and 4,400 school districts in more than 40 states to fund schools and essential services like roads and public safety; and

WHEREAS, local governments in Alaska use the SRS funding to supplement transportation funding, and school operations and capital project needs; and

WHEREAS, the elimination of SRS would have an immediate and detrimental effect on the school system and on local transportation infrastructure; and

WHEREAS, local governments who experienced the loss of these funds would be faced with choices of increased taxes or the loss of jobs, including at schools; and

WHEREAS, a short-term solution for SRS should result in continued funding over the next two years, and a long-term fix must account for the sustainability of the program; and

WHEREAS, a sustainable program may include funding features such as a forest visitor fee, or consolidation within the PILT formula, as an additional factor, or may require a large set-aside that produces a return of sustainable revenue over time.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Alaska Municipal League supports reform of the USDA Forest Service Secure Rural Schools program to include long-term certainty and sustainability of funding.