

S. 1692, the County Payments Reauthorization Act of 2011

S. 1692, the bipartisan County Payments Reauthorization Act of 2011, would fund the Secure Rural Schools and Payments in Lieu of Taxes programs for 5 more years. In total, the bill would provide more than \$1.5 billion to more than 700 counties with national forest lands to support public schools, county road improvement and maintenance projects, collaborative forestry projects, and wildfire risk reduction programs. It also would extend guaranteed full-funding under the PILT program to more than 1,900 counties in 49 States, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands to help fund essential county government programs. The cosponsors have committed to work together to find offsets to fund the payments that would be made under the bill. Cosponsors include Senators Baucus, Crapo, Wyden, Risch, Reid, Cochran, Tester, Blunt, Feinstein, Heller, Tom Udall, Boxer, Cantwell, Murray, Bennet, Merkley, Sanders, Tim Johnson, Begich, McCaskill, Mark Udall and Franken.

Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act

The Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000 is a bipartisan program supported by a large and wide-range of interest groups to support local public schools, improve and maintain county roads, create jobs conducting forest restoration and improvement projects in and around National Forests, and to support local programs to reduce the risk from wildfires. The Act was designed to provide more predictable levels of funding than what would be provided under a 1908 law that gives 25% of revenues from National Forest lands to local counties to support their schools and roads. In 2008, Congress reauthorized the 2000 Act to continue to stabilize and transition payments to counties. The 2008 reauthorization has provided more than \$1.75 billion to counties across the country. Under the 2008 reauthorization, payments to counties under the program gradually were reduced at a rate of 10% each year until the authorization and funding for the program terminated on September 30 of this year.

The County Payments Reauthorization Act of 2011 would reauthorize the program for 5 more years and would ease the annual reduction in payments to 5% each year. The bill also would make a few technical amendments to the 2008 Act, including a new provision that would allow resource advisory committees to choose to use up to 10% of Title II collaborative forestry funding for administrative expenses associated with operating the RAC and to clarify that the Governor of each State is responsible for transmitting to the Forest Service each county's election for allocating funds among Titles II and III.

Payments in Lieu of Taxes ("PILT")

The PILT program was permanently authorized in 1976 to provide Federal payments to local governments to help offset losses in property taxes due to nontaxable Federal lands within their boundaries. Historically, the program was only partially funded through the annual appropriations process. In 2008, along with continuing funding for the Secure Rural Schools program, Congress guaranteed full funding for the PILT program for the first time. As a result, payments to counties under the PILT program have increased from \$232 million in 2007 to a full-funding average of \$370.5 million per year from 2008 through 2011.

The County Payments Reauthorization Act of 2011 would guarantee continued full-funding for the PILT program through 2017.