

WASHINGTON, DC—Congressman Peter DeFazio (D-Springfield) today sent another letter to Speaker Pelosi about the urgent need to include critical county payments funding in the upcoming emergency spending bill. Included with the letter, DeFazio sent letters from 157 school boards, districts and administrators highlighting the critical need for this vital funding. High-level administration sources have indicated that a one year extension of the program in the supplemental would not force a veto threat. However, they have yet to put anything in writing supporting this stance. The President recently threatened to veto a four year extension of the program.

"Though the possibility that county payments will not force a veto by the President is encouraging, I am asking him to confirm this fact in writing. I have been lobbying Congressional leaders to include the funding in the supplemental but, they say they cannot if it will trigger a veto," DeFazio said. "Counties in southwest Oregon are about to start laying off employees by the hundreds into a bad economy -- we're losing sheriffs patrols, jail beds, teachers and other vital public services. We are at the 11th hour and it is critical that something be done now. Curry and Josephine counties could go bankrupt if the funding isn't extended."

The letter is below:

June 18, 2008

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi

Speaker of the House

H232 Capitol

Washington, DC 20515

Dear Madam Speaker:

Last week, I wrote to you to bring to your attention the Administration's possible acceptance on inclusion of a one year extension of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act (Secure Rural Schools) in the Senate-passed version of H.R. 2642, the war supplemental appropriations bill for FY 2008.

Today I write to you about the continued support of this one year extension among educators, and to update you regarding my conversations about the Administration's position on the one year county payments extension. As I mentioned last week, high level Administration officials have indicated that the President will not oppose or issue a veto threat on the bill if a one year reauthorization of Secure Rural Schools is included in the supplemental. That position was verbally reiterated again this week. Although I have been trying to get a written commitment from the Administration to this effect, I have not yet been able to do so, and I fear that time is running out on our counties. I appreciate that you need a written confirmation of the Administration's position on the Secure Rural Schools extension, given the President's recent veto threat on H.R. 3058, a four year reauthorization of the program. A one year reauthorization of Secure Rural Schools is desperately needed. The Secure Rural Schools program aids over 600 rural counties and 4,400 school districts in 42 states.

Just this week, I received more than 160 letters from school boards, teachers, national educational associations, principals, superintendants, and other educators from around the country – including 18 from California – pleading with us to pass the one year extension. I've included copies of these letters for your review, which relate in excruciating detail what the loss of Secure Rural Schools will mean to the children of their states. It is truly heartbreaking. Reauthorizing the Secure Rural Schools program, if even for just one year, will ensure that rural school children continue to have access to a quality education, libraries remain open, and public safety is guaranteed.

Thank you again for your invaluable assistance in reauthorizing the critically important Secure Rural Schools program in the past, and I look forward to continuing to work with you in the very near future to bring this process to a close.

Sincerely,

Peter DeFazio

Member of Congress