

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 8, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, Education, and
Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, Education, and
Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chair Murray and Ranking Member Blunt:

As the Subcommittee prepares the fiscal year (FY) 2022 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies appropriations bill, we urge you to maintain the Senate's critical investments in rural students. Specifically, we ask for your continued support for both the Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP) and the Rural Postsecondary and Economic Development Grant Program. Both of these programs provide crucial targeted support to rural students nationwide.

REAP is the only dedicated federal funding stream to help rural elementary and secondary schools overcome the increased expenses caused by geographic isolation. It consists of two programs – the Small Rural Schools Achievement Program and the Rural Low-Income Schools Program (RLIS). Rural school districts frequently lack the resources and staff needed to compete effectively for federal grants, and often receive formula grant allocations too small to be effective. Since REAP was authorized in 2002, rural schools across the nation have relied on these additional flexible funds to purchase supplies and make technology upgrades; expand curricular offerings, such as in reading, physical education, music, and art; provide distance learning opportunities; fund transportation; and support professional development activities. To support this critical program, we request the inclusion of \$200 million, REAP's authorized funding level, in the FY 2022 appropriations bill.

Additionally, we must work to ensure that students in rural areas who graduate from high school at rates that exceed the national average, but are less likely than their suburban and urban peers to pursue some form of higher learning have the support that they need to connect to postsecondary education opportunities. When rural students do enroll in higher education, they face unique barriers that make them more likely to drop out of school without completing their education. In order to address these longstanding trends, we write to express our support for the inclusion of robust funding for the Rural Postsecondary and Economic Development Grant Programs under the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education. Further, we wish to express our appreciation for the inclusion of funding for this important program in the FY 2021 appropriations bill.

If funded, the Rural Postsecondary and Economic Development Grant Program will support a new initiative to improve postsecondary outcomes for rural students by spurring innovation and promoting partnerships between school districts, institutions of higher education, nonprofit organizations, and regional economic development or workforce development agencies. These partnerships will provide academic and career counseling and exposure to postsecondary education opportunities for students, beginning in middle school and continuing through their secondary and postsecondary education, with the goal of improving rates of postsecondary enrollment and completion among rural students. Additionally, programs supported under this initiative will support the long-term alignment of academic programs with career pathways that prepare rural students for in-demand jobs available in their communities.

We urge your continued support for these two programs and thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator



Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



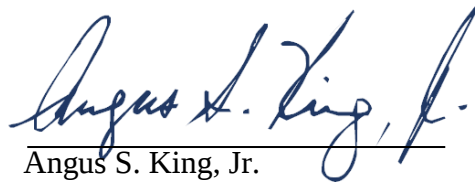
Tina Smith
United States Senator



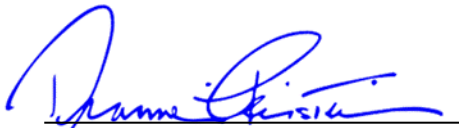
Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



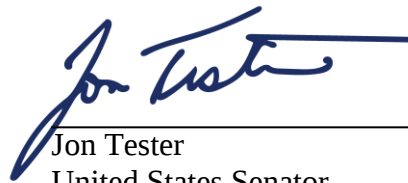
Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



Jon Tester
United States Senator