

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 2, 2020

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, and Education Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, and Education Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Shelby, Vice Chairman Leahy, Chairman Blunt, and Ranking Member Murray:

We write to request the Committee's support for our request to protect state and school district participation in the Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP) in its fiscal year 2021 appropriations bill.

REAP is the only dedicated federal funding stream for supporting rural schools. Since 2003, the Department of Education has permitted states to qualify for funding from the Rural Low-Income Assistance Program based on data measuring participation in the federal Free and Reduced-Price Lunch program as an alternative to the U.S. Census Bureau's poverty data. The Free and Reduced-Price Lunch program is a widely used, comprehensive measure of poverty among school-aged populations.

Earlier this year, the Department abruptly announced that it would no longer accept the poverty measurements it had received from participating states in years past, threatening the eligibility and funding for schools in our states and without any notification to Congress. This change would have excluded nearly 200 school districts from the Rural Low Income Schools Program, creating a funding cliff for rural schools already balancing tight budgets. We appreciate the Subcommittee bringing this issue to the attention of Secretary DeVos during its hearing on the fiscal year 2021 education budget in March. The Secretary wisely reversed course, preventing the change from going into effect this year.

We support preventing further changes in the administration of the program from taking effect in the next fiscal year and urge the Committee to include such language in its

appropriations bill. Without a provision to hold harmless the rural, low-income schools in our states, the students, teachers, administrators, and staffs in our poorest communities risk losing a vital source of educational resources upon which many have relied for nearly twenty years. Doing so would also exacerbate the challenges they face this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We remain committed to working with our colleagues in Congress and with the Department of Education to improve REAP, and we welcome the assistance and recommendations of the Department. While we work toward that goal, we request that the Department be directed to continue to accept the data submitted by our states and school districts in prior years for participation in REAP's Rural Low Income Schools Program.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

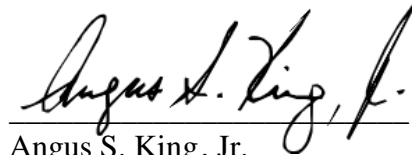
Sincerely,




Susan M. Collins
United States Senator



Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Steve Daines
United States Senator



Jon Tester
United States Senator



James Lankford
United States Senator



James Inhofe
United States Senator



John Cornyn
United States Senator