

PLEASE RESPOND TO:

- 2134 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-3704
(202) 225-6416
- 405 EAST 8TH AVENUE, #2030
EUGENE, OR 97401
(541) 465-6732
1-800-944-9603
- 125 CENTRAL AVENUE, #350
COOS BAY, OR 97420
(541) 269-2609
- 612 SE JACKSON STREET, #9
ROSEBURG, OR 97470
(541) 440-3523
- defazio.house.gov



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
May 19, 2009

PETER A. DeFAZIO
4TH DISTRICT, OREGON

TRANSPORTATION AND
INFRASTRUCTURE

SUBCOMMITTEES:

HIGHWAYS AND TRANSIT
CHAIRMAN

AVIATION

RAILROADS

HOMELAND SECURITY

SUBCOMMITTEES:

TRANSPORTATION SECURITY AND
INFRASTRUCTURE PROTECTION

MANAGEMENT, INVESTIGATION, AND OVERSIGHT

NATURAL RESOURCES

SUBCOMMITTEE:

NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS, AND PUBLIC LANDS

WATER AND POWER

Lane County Board of County Commissioners
Public Service Building
125 East 8th Avenue
Eugene, OR 97401

Dear Commissioners:

I am writing to express my support for county Administrator Jeff Spartz's proposal to restore 84 jail beds and to provide funding needed to enable the district attorney to prosecute non-violent felonies.

The Oregon Criminal Justice Commission recently released a report that found Lane County has the highest rate of early release of offenders and the lowest number of jail beds available per capita in the state. Since the county closed nearly 250 jail beds last year, hundreds of high-risk defendants have been released into our communities - many with violent felony charges. Continued reduction in the number of Lane County jail beds would undermine the county's law enforcement efforts and harm public safety.

I appreciate the difficult decisions the Board of County Commissioners will ultimately have to make. Having served as a Lane County Commissioner for four years in a similar climate of financial and economic uncertainty, I am intimately familiar with the budget challenges you face. I also appreciate that the combination of state budget cuts and the looming expiration of timber payments in four years have forced the Board of County Commissioners to plan conservatively for the future. However, I believe it is necessary to tap into some of the federal revenues now to enforce our laws and protect our communities.

In 2000 members of the Oregon Congressional Delegation worked closely with a tremendous coalition of school administrators; county commissioners, public employee unions, members of the law enforcement community, and congressional members from across the country to pass the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act. At the time, I proposed a permanent solution to provide counties with reliable and predictable payments instead of creating a budget cliff for counties by establishing a sunset date. Unfortunately, my proposal was opposed by the timber industry and county commissioners who had the ear of the then Republican-controlled Congress.

County governments most recently approached the edge of that budget cliff in 2008 when it was still unclear if the extension of Secure Rural Schools (SRS) payments would be signed into law. The Bush Administration's complete neglect and disinterest in reauthorizing the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act has left county governments in a precarious financial situation.

Fortunately, a group of Members working on the House and Senate sides were able to include language in the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008 to extend SRS payments through fiscal year 2011 on a sliding scale. I argued at the time that federal funding was absolutely necessary to ensure our communities could provide critical county services like law enforcement and public safety and adequate funding for a quality public education in rural counties. I went so far as to say publically that lives would be put in jeopardy if Congress failed to authorize some form of continuing payments. My position in Congress in advocating for future SRS payments would be undermined if my home county continues to top Oregon's list of highest early release of offenders and lowest number of jail beds per capita while holding SRS funds in reserve.

I want to make it clear that I am continuing my work in the U.S. House of Representatives to find a long-term solution to SRS payments. In fact, I have crafted another proposal for permanent SRS payments to counties. I have shared this proposal with you and other Oregon county commissioners. In order to preserve the unity of our Congressional Delegation I withheld my proposal from formal introduction and instead lent my support to Senator Merkley's legislation to create a county payments task force. I intend to offer my plan for consideration by the task force as a possible permanent solution.

While Congress continues its work towards a long-term solution, I strongly urge the Board of County Commissioners to include funding for 84 jail beds and support funding for the district attorney's office to prosecute non-violent felonies in the 2009-2010 county budget.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter DeFazio". The signature is stylized and written in a cursive-like font.

Peter DeFazio
Member of Congress