

The Honorable Chellie Pingree
Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
2007 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
531 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable David Joyce
Ranking Member, Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and
Related Agencies
2007 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Ranking Member, Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and
Related Agencies
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

May 5, 2022

Dear Chair Merkley, Chair Pingree, Ranking Member Murkowski, and Ranking Member Joyce:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations and local governments, we urge you to support critical investments in the communities and working families most affected by America's declining demand for coal in the fiscal year 2023 (FY23) appropriations bills. **In particular, we are asking for a budget of \$165 million for The Abandoned Mine Land Economic Revitalization (AMLER) Program, which has brought enormous benefits to communities hard hit by the decline of the coal industry, as well as an OSMRE report regarding the program impacts and best state and tribal implementation practices.**

Our communities are working to build a bright future as we cope with the realities of a changing energy landscape. For more than a century, coal communities have been instrumental in powering the national economy, and have made heavy sacrifices to provide electricity for the nation. The shift in America's energy use has resulted in massive job losses in many of these communities and has left local economies struggling. Despite the current challenges, our communities are home to rich assets, including our land, water, and people. Many of our organizations and local governments are working to leverage these assets as we diversify and strengthen our local economies.

The Abandoned Mine Land Economic Revitalization (AMLER) Program, formerly known as the AML Pilot Program, was created in 2016 to reclaim abandoned mine lands and spur economic development in coal communities, as a pilot for the bipartisan RECLAIM Act. The program has

provided critical funding for a number of innovative development projects in communities devastated by the decline of coal. While the RECLAIM Act is no longer moving forward, the AMLER program continues the vision of turning abandoned coal mine lands into economic engines for transitioning communities.

As organizations that have seen first hand the power of this program to create new opportunities, we strongly recommend that the AMLER program is increased to \$165 million for FY23.

Communities across the region have directly benefited from the AMLER Program. The Reclaiming Appalachia Coalition, a multi-state coalition of organizations working to advance forward-thinking economic development projects on former mine sites, has been directly involved in the development of dozens of AMLER projects. Since 2018, the Coalition has had a hand in 17 funded projects in multiple states, totaling nearly \$27 million in AMLER awards.

Economic modeling suggests that these projects will have a total impact of \$82.3 million in economic output, support 524 jobs, and provide \$22.6 million in earnings to employees. This is the type of economic stimulus needed in coal communities. However, the total potential economic impact is much greater. The program is significantly oversubscribed. There is a strong interest in the program that outstrips currently available funds. For example, in West Virginia alone, in 2021, 59 project applications were submitted from 21 counties, requesting a total of \$216 million. Only \$25 million was available for the state. In Kentucky, there were over 70 applications in 2020 for the program, but only nine were able to be funded. There is huge potential – and need – for this program.

Additionally, as the program has now received seven years of funding, it is appropriate for OSMRE to conduct a review of the state and tribal programs' practices related to implementation of the AMLER program, determine best practices, and offer more guidance to the states and tribes for future funding years. To that end, **we recommend Congress include the enclosed report language in the FY 23 appropriations bill.** Looking forward, we will be working with the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement as well as state agencies to ensure that this program is as impactful as possible. We are also interested in exploring ways this successful program could be expanded to coal impacted regions beyond Appalachian states.

Rebuilding regional economies takes many years. Coal communities and workers have powered America for more than a century, and they and their families deserve our support as America's energy landscape changes. We urge Congress to fund this program to the recommended \$165 million to maximize assistance to coal communities in diversifying and growing their local economies and providing new opportunities for their workers, and to require OSMRE to conduct a study regarding the program in order to ensure the program funding is as impactful as possible.

Sincerely,

American Friends Service Committee (Pennsylvania)
Appalachian Citizens' Law Center
Appalachian Voices
Boyd County, Kentucky Fiscal Court
Center for Coalfield Justice (Pennsylvania)
City of Smithers, West Virginia
Coalfield Development Corp. (West Virginia)
Downstream Strategies (West Virginia)
Friends For Environmental Justice (Appalachia)
Kentuckians For The Commonwealth
Kentucky Resources Council
Mountain Association
Mountain View Marina & Campground, LLC (Dickenson County, Virginia)
National Wildlife Federation
Pennsylvania Council of Churches
Pocahontas Off Road, LLC (Tazewell County, Virginia)
Rural Action (Ohio)
Russell County, Virginia
Sierra Club
Shaping Our Appalachian Region (Kentucky)
The Alliance for Appalachia
The Clinch Coalition (Virginia)
Tó Nizhóní Ání (Navajo)
West Virginia Council of Churches
West Virginia Rivers Coalition
WV Citizen Action

Contact: Chelsea Barnes, Appalachian Voices, (614) 205-6424, chelsea@appvoices.org
Enclosure: FY 2023 AMLER Report Language

Report Language for FY 2023 AMLER Program

(a) Abandoned Mine Land Economic Revitalization Study.—The Secretary of the Interior (Secretary) shall conduct a study regarding administration of the Abandoned Mine Land Economic Revitalization program, including —

(1) a review of each state and tribe’s process for soliciting grant applications and selecting projects for funding under the Abandoned Mine Land Economic Revitalization grant program;

(2) the status of unspent funds, and how states, tribes and the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement reallocated unspent funds, including each state and tribe’s processes for withdrawing funds for projects that do not make progress toward completion as well as each state and tribe’s process for reallocating funds when OSMRE does not grant an Authorization to Proceed for a selected project;

(3) the number of applications and the number of different applicants for state and tribal grants, as well as the number of different applicants receiving project funds and the frequency of applicants receiving multiple rounds of grant funding;

(b) Report.—Not later than one year after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit to the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations, the Committee on Natural Resources of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources of the Senate a report that describes the results of the study and the conclusions and recommendations of the study.