

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chair, Committee on Appropriations  
154 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Susan Collins  
Vice Chair, Committee on Appropriations  
413 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

May 1, 2023

Dear Chair Murray and Vice Chair Collins:

Communities impacted by coal mining across the country face a unique set of challenges. Recent laws such as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, Inflation Reduction Act, CHIPS and Science Act and other initiatives have improved the landscape of opportunities as these communities seek to transform their economies and recover from the loss of their economic foundations. We must continue to build upon these investments and support essential programs so this momentum isn't lost.

The Fiscal Year 2024 budget provides a significant opportunity for Congress to bolster programs for coal-impacted communities and help revitalize their economies, as well as shore up key protections for coal miners and mine safety. The 35 undersigned organizations ask that you support the following investments in the FY 24 appropriations bills:

- \$5 million for the Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative under the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE) in addition to the OSMRE's full FY24 budget request \$301.9 million;
- \$447 million for the Mine Safety and Health Administration's budget, particularly for staff to increase inspections at coal mine;
- \$165 million for The Abandoned Mine Land Economic Revitalization (AMLER) Program, including a 0.5% carveout for the DOI Office of the Inspector General for program administration as proposed in the President's budget;
- \$8 million to support the work of the Interagency Working Group (IWG) on Coal and Power Plant Communities and Economic Revitalization;
- \$200 million to fund the Distressed Area Recompete Pilot Program, with a carveout for rural communities;
- Continued robust support of the Economic Development Administration;
- An additional \$166 million over the FY 2023 budget for AmeriCorps to increase the living allowance provided to AmeriCorps members;
- \$32 million for the USDA's Rural Partners Network to enable the agency to expand the program to more states.

In recent years, Congress has passed important support for the cleanup of hazardous abandoned mine lands (AML). However, this funding typically focuses on the most dangerous sites, and rarely includes revegetation. **The Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative (ARRI)** was developed to fill that gap. This underfunded program has a proven track record, but must be scaled up given recent concerns regarding flooding and other negative community impacts. In addition, a fully funded OSMRE is required

to enable inspections and enforcement of ongoing mining to ensure communities are protected, as well as the successful implementation of expanded reclamation funding.

Due to increased exposure to silica dust, an epidemic of black lung disease has emerged in Central Appalachia over the last decade. The emergence of this epidemic corresponds to a decade of decline in the Mine Safety and Health Administration's staff. Since 2013, MSHA's total full-time equivalents (FTEs) have decreased by approximately 30%. A decrease in funding for enforcement in conjunction with an increase of cases of this deadly disease is unconscionable. As organizations concerned about these troubling trends, **we request that the MSHA program budget be increased to \$447 million for FY24.**

The Abandoned Mine Land Economic Revitalization (AMLER) Program, formerly known as the AML Pilot Program, has provided critical funding to turn abandoned coal mine lands into economic engines for transitioning communities. We strongly recommend that the **AMLER program continue to be funded at \$165 million for FY24**, with a 0.5% carve-out to help support staffing at the Department of Interior to oversee the program and address delays in funding distributions.

**The Interagency Working Group on Coal and Power Plant Communities and Economic Revitalization (IWG)** was established in 2021 with the goal of fostering economic revitalization of these communities and coordinating the identification and delivery of federal resources to revitalize the economies of coal, oil and gas, and power plant communities. Funding is required to improve interagency collaboration to engage coal communities and provide the technical assistance and resources they need.

**The Recompete Pilot Program** was enacted as part of the CHIPS and Science Act of 2022 (as the Distressed Area Recompete Pilot Program), and appropriated at \$200 million through the EDA to support distressed communities in FY 2023. Over 85% of persistently poor communities are rural; rural community inclusion in this pilot program is essential. The program must intentionally set aside funds for rural places and make special efforts to support the ability of rural communities to participate.

Robust funding of the **Economic Development Administration** is essential to support the job skills training, technical assistance, and infrastructure improvements needed to attract new businesses and ensure existing businesses to allow coal communities to adapt to changing market circumstances.

Expanded program funding would allow **AmeriCorps to increase the living allowance provided to AmeriCorps members** so that national service is a more accessible pathway to success, as well as establishing a Civilian Climate Corps program to help communities address the climate crisis by creating service opportunities and job training programs in emerging industries.

**The USDA's Rural Partners Network** was launched in April 2022 and is now active in 36 community networks in 10 states and Puerto Rico, providing much needed capacity to identify projects and provide technical assistance. But more communities need this vital support; funding is needed to expand this program to more states to ensure investments end up where they are needed most.

Coal mining communities are working to build a bright economic future as we cope with the realities of a changing energy landscape. Despite the current challenges, these communities are home to rich assets — including our land, water, heritage and people — and many of our organizations and local governments are

working to leverage these assets as we diversify and strengthen our local economies. 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.

On behalf of the 35 undersigned organizations, we urge you to support these critical investments in the FY24 appropriations bill.

Sincerely,

The Alliance for Appalachia

Appalachian Citizens' Law Center

Appalachian Voices

Appalshop CMI

Center for Coalfield Justice

Christians For The Mountains

Climate Institute

Coalfield Development

Downstream Strategies

Eastern PA Coalition for Abandoned Mine Reclamation

FreshWater Accountability Project

Friends For Environmental Justice

Friends of the Cheat

Kentucky Conservation Committee

Kentucky Resources Council

Latino Farmers & Ranchers International, Inc.

Livelihoods Knowledge Exchange Network (LiKEN)

Mid-Ohio Valley Climate Action

Mountain Association

National Wildlife Federation

Northern Plains Resource Council

Ohio Environmental Council

PennFuture

Pennsylvania Interfaith Power & Light

Pittsburgh Food Policy Council

ReImagine Appalachia

Rise Up WV

Rural Advancement Fund of the National Sharecroppers Fund

Rural Coalition

Sierra Club

West Virginia Citizen Action Group

West Virginia Community Development Hub

West Virginia Council of Churches

West Virginia Rivers Coalition

Western Colorado Alliance