

The Honorable Susan Collins
Chair
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chair
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray
Vice Chair
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rosa L. DeLauro
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

April 28, 2025

Dear Chairs Collins and Cole, Vice Chair Murray, and Ranking Member DeLauro:

Appalachian 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. Our work is bipartisan. Every day Appalachian communities work across political differences to find common ground; rebuild our economies; update dangerous, outdated infrastructure and create a stronger foundation for the future.

These investments should be protected from cuts and freezes, and the agencies implementing these programs must be properly funded and staffed. Congress must ensure that the legislative branch's Article I power of the purse is protected as part of any funding agreement.

The 34 organizations and elected officials signed onto this letter ask that you support the following investments in the FY26 appropriations bills:

Flood Resiliency:

As extreme weather continues across the region, Appalachian communities need federal support for building flood resilience that will save the federal government money by reducing disaster recovery needs. According to the National Institute of Building Sciences, federal taxpayers can save \$7 in response and recovery costs for every \$1 spent on building resilience. The following priorities would reduce overall federal spending while increasing protections of lives and local economies:

- **\$60 million for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Disaster Home Repair Program, and expand its eligible use** through 2025: Expanded use of the program will be significant in helping low-income, rural homeowners make repairs to their home for a safe living environment for their families.
- **Expand use of FEMA's public assistance program to cover private bridge repair and replacement.** When a flood destroys private culverts and bridges, it can cost tens of thousands of dollars to repair the damage and restore access; Congress should ensure all rural homeowners get the support they need when rebuilding after a disaster, especially in restoring emergency access on private roads and bridges.
- **\$175 million for the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA) program, and \$2 billion for a FEMA pre-disaster mitigation program.** FMA provides essential support to communities covered by the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP)

for flood recovery and resilience. Additionally, interest in FEMA's former Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program annually far exceeded available funding, with \$5.6 billion in applications for FY23 from the \$1 billion available. Though BRIC may no longer exist, FEMA must continue to make substantial investments in pre-disaster mitigation to protect American lives, property, and our national economy from the impacts of disasters.

- **\$400 million, the authorized level, for FEMA's Flood Hazard Mapping and Risk Analysis program.** Federal investments in flood mapping have not kept pace with the need or with increasing climate impacts. More expansive and accurate maps are needed, particularly in rural Appalachian communities.
- **\$33 million for the U.S. Geological Survey's (USGS) Federal Priority Streamgages (FPS) network and \$50 million for USGS's Cooperative Matching Funds Program,** which helps support the National Streamflow Network. These programs help ensure that communities at risk from extreme weather, including rural communities across Appalachia, can monitor and respond to flood risk.

Workforce Development and Worker Protections:

Continued funding for key workforce and employment programs designed to reconnect disconnected and dislocated workers are of particular importance to Appalachian communities. These programs invest in proven training models to equip workers with skills for quality jobs in industries such as construction, clean energy and manufacturing. Recommended funding levels to help grow the Appalachian workforce include:

- **Increase and strengthen investments in workforce and education programs, including the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).** Now is the time to expand workforce development investments that generate a robust pipeline of skilled workers to bolster our nation's economic competitiveness while improving the lives of Americans.
- **\$120 million for Reentry Employment Opportunities** grants that connect justice-involved adults and youth with reentry services.
- **Increased funding for AmeriCorps and Youthbuild,** which provide job training and service opportunities in clean energy, conservation, and climate resiliency.
- **\$335 million for the federal Registered Apprenticeship program** which builds pathways to in-need industries including construction, clean energy and manufacturing.

Supports for Children, Workers and Families:

Basic programs to support children and families are an essential foundation to a productive workforce and stable economy; this includes ensuring all members of our communities have access to nutrition, childcare, housing and basic services.

- **Strengthen and protect funding for nutrition programs** including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), child nutrition programs that support access to nutritious school meals, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and nutrition programs that serve older adults who are experiencing food insecurity.
- **\$12.4 billion for the Child Care and Development Block Grant and increased funding for Headstart** to help states expand access to affordable child care for families in need. Many of our communities are childcare deserts, which jeopardizes workers' economic security, and puts childhood development at risk.
- **Provide increased funding for the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).** A stable workforce and economy depends on affordable housing. Programs such as the Emergency Housing Voucher program (EHV), which provided rental assistance vouchers specifically targeted to

people experiencing or at immediate risk of homelessness, are essential to address the Appalachian housing crisis.

- **\$4.1 billion for Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and \$1 billion for the Low Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP).** All households deserve access to basic utilities, including safe and clean drinking water and wastewater services. Households' inability to pay for services can create revenue gaps for utilities. In addition to increasing budget levels, staff should be reinstated to full capacity to efficiently administer this essential program.

Reshoring Manufacturing and supporting the build of clean, modern energy:

- **Support for the growth of advanced manufacturing through tax credits and other Inflation Reduction Act and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funded programs.** Clean energy and manufacturing tax credits, alongside demonstration and implementation grants, fueled a [doubling](#) in manufacturing and clean energy investment in projects in central Appalachia between 2022 and 2023. Maintaining these supports is essential for ensuring certainty and continued growth for industry and the energy sector in the region.

Protections for coal communities:

Congress must shore up key protections for coal miners and mine safety as well as ensure that communities are not left with the burden of dangerous and polluting unreclaimed coal mines.

- **Fully fund programs that work to prevent black lung and support miners with this disease:** Due to increased exposure to silica dust, an epidemic of black lung disease has emerged in Central Appalachia over the last decade. It is critical that Congress fully fund MSHA at \$406.5 million, including funding to support the agency's enforcement of the silica dust rule. Further, we must fully fund HRSA's Black Lung Clinics Program at \$12.19 million in order to ensure that these important services to coal workers are maintained. Another key actor in preventing black lung disease is the CDC's Occupational Health and Safety (OSHA), which must be funded at \$363.2 million in order to continue critical programs which address safety and health issues for mine workers. We also ask that you urge the administration to reconsider any staff terminations at NIOSH and other agencies that will negatively impact the health of coal mining communities.
- Congress should also act to **increase black lung benefits stipends** and tie benefit adjustments to the cost of living to support miners who can no longer work due to this disease.
- **Fully fund the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE) at \$316.7 million** and maintain staffing levels across the country. OSMRE monitors permitting, enforces rules and administers reclamation programs, like the AML program, at mine sites. Reductions in the agency's budget and staffing put coal communities in danger of increased flooding, landslides, polluted waterways and other mine-related disasters when the land is not properly reclaimed.
- **\$5 million for the Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative under the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE).** This underfunded program has a proven track record, but must be scaled up given recent concerns regarding flooding and other negative community impacts arising from unreclaimed or inadequately reclaimed mine sites.

Economic Development:

Historically underinvested communities often face the most challenges to obtaining the resources needed to rebuild. The programs below are essential to support the job skills training, technical assistance, and infrastructure improvements needed to allow Appalachian communities to adapt to new challenges and opportunities.

- **\$437 million for the Economic Development Administration** to award grants that help communities bolster innovation, competitiveness, and economic development.
- Continued funding for the Department of Energy Office of Clean Energy Demonstrations (OCED), which administers transformative programs including the Clean Energy on Mine Land Program, to continue its work to advance energy projects authorized under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.
- **\$324 million for the Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) Fund**, as well as a continuation of the CDFI Bond Guarantee Program with \$500 million in guarantee authority. CDFIs are private sector financial institutions that invest, lend, and deliver responsible, affordable financial products and services to under-invested communities across the country.
- **Robust overall funding levels for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development (USDA-RD) programs, including \$32 million for the USDA's Rural Partners Network** enable the agency to expand this capacity building technical assistance program to more states to ensure that investments land where they are needed most. USDA-RD programs empower rural communities to invest in clean water, broadband, housing, economic development and more.

Finally, recent legislation, such as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the Inflation Reduction Act, and the CHIPS and Science Act, have given a significant boost to so many struggling communities. Congress approved these funds to help us create jobs, lower energy costs, support small businesses, prepare for future threats from flooding, repair and update infrastructure, and countless other important efforts. These funds have been incredibly successful in our region, and should be protected and maintained.

These recommendations span a broad range of issues, but the problems that Appalachia faces are complex and interconnected. We invite you to join and support the Appalachian communities that have rolled up their sleeves and are working hard to build a brighter future for our region, and for our nation.

Sincerely,

Appalachian Citizens' Law Center

Appalachian Voices

American Friends Service Committee - WV

Appalshop

Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO)

Citizens Coal Council

Christians For The Mountains

Climate Action PA

Eastern Kentucky Community Land Trust

Eastern Pennsylvania Coalition for Abandoned Mine Reclamation (EPCAMR)

Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky

FreshWater Accountability Project

Kentucky Conservation Committee

Kentucky Resources Council

Kentucky Riverkeeper
Kentucky Waterways Alliance
Landforce
LiKEN (Livelihoods Knowledge Exchange Network)
Mid-Ohio Valley Climate Action
Mountain Association
North American Climate, Conservation and Environment (NACCE)
PennFuture
ReImagine Appalachia
Rise Up WV
River Fields, Louisville, Ky
RiverWise
Sierra Club Kentucky Chapter
SOCM (Statewide Organizing for Community eMpowerment)
Southwest Clark Neighborhood Association
Three Rivers Waterkeeper
TRAFFED-RDC
West Virginia Environmental Council
WV Healthy Kids and Families Coalition
West Virginia Rivers Coalition

The Honorable Susan Collins
Chair
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chair
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray
Vice Chair
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rosa L. DeLauro
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

April 28, 2025

Dear Chairs Collins and Cole, Vice Chair Murray, and Ranking Member DeLauro:

The 34 undersigned organizations work in Appalachia or are allies of Appalachian communities that have directly experienced, or are at risk of experiencing, devastation from severe flooding. We urge you to support critical investments in flood recovery and resilience for our communities in the FY26 appropriations bills.

Hardworking communities across Appalachia are increasingly vulnerable to extreme rainfall. Over the last decade, there have been more than 20 federally declared flooding disasters across central Appalachia, including Hurricane Helene in September 2024 in western North Carolina and flooding across Kentucky, Virginia and West Virginia in February and April 2025. These events stymie long-term economic development by continuing to hit communities still rebuilding after the last “record breaking” flood. As extreme weather continues across the region, Appalachian communities need federal support for building flood resilience that will save the federal government money by reducing disaster recovery needs.

The Fiscal Year 2026 budget provides a significant opportunity for Congress to uplift local initiatives for building flood resilience happening in Appalachian communities. In FY26 appropriations bills, we ask that you preserve funding for floodplain management and nature-based hazard mitigation programs, flood hazard mapping/data programs, and flood hazard mitigation. We also ask you to exercise your oversight obligations over the Executive Branch to ensure that all funding enacted by Congress remains obligated to its legislative purpose, including the contracted grants, programs and salaries of career civil servants charged with helping Americans respond to, recover from and reduce the damage of disasters. We ask that you support the following investments in the FY 26 appropriations bills:

- **\$60 million for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Disaster Home Repair Program, and expand its eligible use** to include major disaster declarations from calendar year 2022 through 2025. The Rural Disaster Home Repair Program was originally established following the devastating floods in eastern Kentucky in 2022 to help rural households, often not covered by flood insurance, repair and rebuild their homes by making up for shortfalls from the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) individual assistance program. Now three years later, we see the annual impacts on rural households as floods continue to devastate communities in Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia, most notably from Hurricane Helene in September 2024 and the flooding across central Appalachia in February and April 2025. Expanded use of the program to include major disaster declarations through calendar year 2025 will be significant in helping low-income, rural homeowners make the necessary repairs to their home for a safe living environment for their families.
- **Expand use of FEMA’s public assistance program to cover private bridge repair and replacement.** Following the Kentucky floods of 2022, community members were abundantly clear

about a critical unmet need: federal support for private bridge repair. In rural areas across the country, people use private infrastructure like roads and bridges to access their homes due to a lack of pre-existing public infrastructure when communities were established. But when a flood destroys private culverts and bridges, it can cost tens of thousands of dollars to repair the damage and restore access from the home to everyday life and emergency services, pulling funds from limited individual assistance aid needed to make necessary repairs to someone's home. Recognizing this need in Appalachian communities, congressional leaders from western North Carolina championed a provision that would allow public assistance funding to support private road and bridge repair for victims of Hurricane Helene in North Carolina in the 2024 disaster supplemental funding bill, but this program was eventually stripped from the final American Relief Act. In the new Congress, the North Carolina delegation has introduced the Restoring Access to Mountain Homes Act, but this bill continues to restrict the program's eligibility to homes in North Carolina impacted by Hurricane Helene. While this legislation is a great start to addressing this issue, the fact stands that rural areas across the country need this assistance in the aftermath of a disaster. Congress should ensure all rural homeowners get the support they need when rebuilding after a disaster, especially in restoring emergency access on private roads and bridges.

- **\$175 million for the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA) program, and \$2 billion for a FEMA pre-disaster mitigation program.** FMA is a fiscally responsible competitive grant program that provides essential support to communities covered by the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) for flood recovery and resilience. By focusing on properties participating in NFIP, FEMA invests in lowering future costs to taxpayers through flood insurance payouts by proactively fortifying insured properties. In FY23, FEMA received more than 424 applications for the program from states, local communities, Tribes, and territories, totaling \$2.3 billion in requested federal cost share and setting a new record for FMA applications. Additionally, interest in FEMA's former Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program annually far exceeded available funding, with \$5.6 billion in applications for FY23 from the \$1 billion available. BRIC was a key piece of the risk reduction puzzle, as a program that supported community projects and capacity-building activities – including building hazard mitigation solutions that incorporate nature to improve the functions of the landscape. Though BRIC is no longer being funded by this Administration, FEMA must continue to make substantial investments in pre-disaster mitigation to protect American lives, property, and our national economy from the impacts of disasters.
- **\$400 million, the authorized level, for FEMA's Flood Hazard Mapping and Risk Analysis program.** Federal investments in flood mapping have not kept pace with the need or with increasing climate impacts. Congress underfunded this effort by over \$100 million in both FY24 and FY25, all while thousands of U.S. communities lack maps entirely, and about 15% of community flood maps are over 15 years old. More expansive and accurate maps are needed, particularly in rural Appalachian communities, as historical mapping efforts targeted higher population areas. This funding would help enable FEMA to generate updated and modern floodplain maps to provide communities with an accurate understanding of present and future flood risk. Updated maps should account for anticipated climate impacts, and incorporate mapping of existing natural floodplain areas to understand where protective natural features exist and where they have been lost.
- **\$5 million for the Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative under the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE).** In recent years, Congress has passed important support for the cleanup of hazardous abandoned mine lands. However, this funding typically focuses on the most dangerous sites, and rarely includes reforestation that restores the landscape and its ecological function on sites reclaimed to only meet the minimum revegetation requirements using grass. 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 arising from unreclaimed or inadequately reclaimed mine sites.

- **\$33 million for the U.S. Geological Survey's (USGS) Federal Priority Streamgages (FPS) network.** This network of nearly 3,400 streamgages tracks, in near real-time, streamflows across the U.S. Designed to be a stable backbone network, the FPS provides crucial, timely information that saves lives, saves property, and informs the work of numerous federal agencies, including Department of Homeland Security, FEMA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, along with numerous state and local governments. Funding shortfalls at USGS have already led to the closure of dozens of streamgage sites across the country – without additional support for the FPS, this trend will continue, and more communities will be at risk. USGS should prioritize deploying additional streamgages in Appalachia, given the region's increasing risk from extreme precipitation events. Additional streamgages across Appalachia following recent flooding events has increased local preparedness for future disasters, but the rollout has been slow. Additional funding to expedite the network's buildout would reduce future lives lost when mountain streams are quickly swelling with flood waters.
- **\$50 million for USGS's Cooperative Matching Funds Program,** which helps support the National Streamflow Network. This network of about 8,700 streamgages complements the FPS; National Streamflow Network gages are funded via up to a 50 percent cost-share between USGS and Tribal, regional, state, or local partners. The National Streamflow Network is a key source for tracking and analyzing potential flood events. In FY22-24, appropriated funds for the Cooperative Matching Funds Program remained virtually stagnant while the reliance on non-appropriated FPS funding increased by almost 10 percent. This shift in funding places even more pressure on struggling state and local communities to fill in the gap to keep streamgage sites operating. Increasing funding for this program would ensure that more communities at risk from extreme weather, including rural communities across Appalachia, can monitor and respond to flood risk.

Flooding is the greatest natural hazard facing the Appalachian region. Congress can proactively invest in the region's flood resilience now to reduce future disaster recovery costs. According to the National Institute of Building Sciences, federal taxpayers can save \$7 in response and recovery costs for every \$1 spent on building resilience. Our communities need these fiscally responsible investments that will reduce overall federal spending while increasing protections of lives and local economies.

Sincerely,

Appalachian Citizens' Law Center

Appalachian Voices

American Friends Service Committee - WV

Appalshop

The Association of State Floodplain Managers

Christians For The Mountains

Climate Action PA

Eastern Kentucky Community Land Trust

Eastern Pennsylvania Coalition for Abandoned Mine Reclamation (EPCAMR)

Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky

FreshWater Accountability Project

Kentucky Conservation Committee
Kentucky Resources Council
Kentucky Riverkeeper
Kentucky Waterways Alliance
Livelihoods Knowledge Exchange Network (LiKEN)
Mid-Ohio Valley Climate Action
Mountain Association
National Wildlife Federation
North American Climate, Conservation and Environment (NACCE)
PennFuture
ReImagine Appalachia
Rise Up WV
RiverWise
River Fields, Louisville, Ky
Sierra Club Kentucky Chapter
SOCM-Statewide Organizing for Community eMpowerment
Southwest Clark Neighborhood Association
Three Rivers Waterkeeper
TRAFFED-RDC
Virginia Conservation Network
West Virginia Environmental Council
West Virginia Rivers Coalition
Wetlands Watch

The Honorable Susan Collins
Chair
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chair
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray
Vice Chair
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rosa L. DeLauro
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

April 28, 2025

Dear Chairs Collins and Cole, Vice Chair Murray, and Ranking Member DeLauro:

As part of the FY26 appropriations process, the undersigned 25 organizations request 1) boosted support for the Mine Safety and Health Administration's (MSHA) budget, particularly for funding to support the implementation of the permissible exposure limit to silica rule, 2) maintained funding for federal black lung clinics, 3) support for the Center for Disease Control's (CDC) Occupational Safety & Health Budget and 4) a change to the way that black lung benefits are calculated.

Due to increased exposure to silica dust, an epidemic of black lung disease has emerged in Central Appalachia over the last decade. Incidence of disease in coal miners is occurring at an unprecedented rate and today's miners have higher mortality rates from lung disease than previous generations of miners.¹ In Central Appalachia, 1 in 5 tenured miners has black lung disease and 1 in 20 have the most severe and totally disabling form of the disease - Progressive Massive Fibrosis (PMF). Researchers from the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) have stated, "We can think of no other industry or workplace in the United States in which this would be considered acceptable."²

It is critical that Congress **fully fund MSHA at \$406.5 million, including funding to support the agency's enforcement of the silica dust rule.** Congress attempted to strip MSHA's ability to enforce the silica dust rule meant to reduce incidents of black lung disease in the FY25 House appropriations bill. We were appalled by this suggested language that would have sacrificed the health and safety of coal miners across the country. Congress should be doing all it can to stop the black lung epidemic, and that includes robust agency funding and maintaining the silica dust standard.

The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) provides funding for 15 black lung clinics across the country. These clinics provide essential healthcare and benefits counseling to thousands of sick miners each year. We ask that you **fully fund HRSA's Black Lung Clinics Program at \$12.19 million** in order to ensure that these important services to coal workers are maintained.

¹ Blackley, D.J. et al. (2018) Continued increase in prevalence of coal workers' pneumoconiosis in the United States, 1970–2017. Am J Public Health. 108:1220-1222.; <https://blogs.cdc.gov/niosh-science-blog/2023/02/27/mining-lung-disease/>

² American Journal of Public Health, 2018. "Continued Increase in the Presence of Coal Workers' Pneumoconiosis in the United States, 1970 - 2017." Blackley et al, AJPH, September 2018

The CDC's Occupational Health and Safety Budget includes funding for two important programs for miners: the Mining Research program and the Enhanced Coal Workers' Health Surveillance Program (ECWHSP). The Mining Research program researches and addresses safety and health issues for mine workers, including the development of technologies to improve ventilation and address respirable mine dust. For example, this program has supported the development of new technologies to monitor silica dust exposure levels which will be critical to prevent black lung disease and certifies respirators that are needed for the implementation of the silica dust rule. The ECWHSP provides free lung screenings to miners and studies respiratory disease related to coal mine dust exposure. Yet on April 1, 2025, Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Kennedy announced a 10,000-employee reduction of HHS staff, including nearly 900 employees at the NIOSH, which amounts to two-thirds of their employees. This includes offices in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, which has a robust mine safety department, and Morgantown, West Virginia, that administers ECWHSP. These cuts to critical functions at NIOSH have resulted in MSHA pausing enforcement of a rule to lower miners' exposure to silica dust, a critical measure to prevent black lung disease. **We urge you to fully fund the CDC's Occupational Health and Safety budget at \$363.2 million in order to continue these critical programs. We also ask that you urge the administration to reconsider any staff terminations at NIOSH and other agencies that will negatively impact the health of coal mining communities.**

In addition to MSHA's budget, we ask you to increase monthly black lung benefit rates and adjust how they are calculated. Benefit levels are currently tied to the federal pay scale rather than the cost of living, which disconnects benefit levels from inflation. In 1969, when the federal black lung benefits program was created, a miner received \$144.50 each month to help support their cost of living. Adjusting for inflation, that would be approximately \$1,295.15 today. However, the monthly benefit rate has not kept up with rising inflation and, today, individual miners receive just \$785.70 a month — nearly 40% less than the original value and missing \$500 a month in their original buying power. The benefits for a miner and a dependent in 2025 is \$1,178.60 a month which is more than \$3,000 lower than the average cost of living for two people in coal communities like Indiana County, Pennsylvania; Pike County, Kentucky; and Kanawha County, West Virginia. The fix is simple: **Congress needs to increase black lung benefits stipends and tie benefit adjustments to the cost of living rather than the federal pay scale.**

Coal workers have powered America for our entire history. Today's workers that continue that noble and patriotic tradition deserve better workplace protections, while those that are sick with black lung deserve continued support by Congress to uphold the federal government's promise to benefits made in 1969.

Sincerely,

Appalachian Citizens' Law Center

Appalachian Voices

Appalshop

American Friends Service Committee - WV

Christians for the Mountains

Citizens Coal Council

Climate Action PA
Eastern Kentucky Community Land Trust
FreshWater Accountability Project
Eastern Pennsylvania Coalition for Abandoned Mine Reclamation (EPCAMR)
Kentucky Conservation Committee
Kentucky Resources Council
Kentucky Riverkeeper
Kentucky Waterways Alliance
Mid-Ohio Valley Climate Action
North American Climate, Conservation and Environment(NACCE)
PennFuture
ReImagine Appalachia
River Fields, Louisville, Ky
Rise Up WV
Sierra Club Kentucky Chapter
SOCM-Statewide Organizing for Community eMpowerment
Three Rivers Waterkeeper
West Virginia Environmental Council
West Virginia Rivers Coalition

The Honorable Susan Collins
Chair
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chair
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray
Vice Chair
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rosa L. DeLauro
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

April 28th, 2025

Dear Chairs Collins and Cole, Vice Chair Murray, and Ranking Member DeLauro:

Coal mining communities across the country are grappling with the impacts of unreclaimed mines. As of 2020, there were approximately 1.5 million acres of mine land in need of reclamation between Title IV abandoned mine lands (AML) and Title V modern mine sites. While Congress made significant progress in remediating AML with the passage of the \$11.3 billion AML fund in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the federal Office of Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Enforcement (OSMRE) must continue its mission to enforce federal reclamation standards on abandoned and active coal mines. Completed mine reclamation protects Appalachian communities from polluting runoff and dangerous mine features, creates new job opportunities and lowers regional flood risk to protect lives and property from devastating floods.

The undersigned 26 organizations representing and working with coal mining communities across the country write to request that you use the FY 2026 appropriations process to provide OSMRE with the resources necessary to effectively execute their mission of protecting communities by ensuring complete and expedient site reclamation. This will require both increased program funding and preserving federal staff positions who manage OSMRE's work portfolio. Specifically, we ask you to include the following requests for the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE) in your FY 2026 appropriations priorities:

1. **Fully fund OSMRE at \$316.7 million and maintain staffing levels across the country.** OSMRE monitors permitting, enforces rules and administers reclamation programs, like the AML program, at mine sites. This work includes maintaining full regulatory authority for coal mining programs in some states and on all Tribal lands. For states that manage their own regulatory programs, OSMRE must still provide financial support for them to operate because of the high costs of monitoring and enforcement. If states were forced to give up their regulatory primacy due to a lack of sufficient federal funding, the cost for OSMRE to administer all state programs would be significantly more expensive for federal taxpayers than the current state-federal structure.

Given the historic investment in the AML program in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the complicated challenge of reclaiming modern mines as coal companies continue to go bankrupt, and the Trump administration's goals of increased domestic coal production, Congress should provide OSMRE with the necessary budget and staff to perform oversight, enforcement, and administration of these programs that protect mining communities and fulfill the federal government's obligations to Tribes. Reductions in the agency's budget and staffing put coal

communities in danger of increased flooding¹, landslides, polluted waterways and other mine-related disasters when the land is not properly reclaimed.

2. **Dedicate \$5 million to the Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative (ARRI).** In April 2023, a coalition of sixty-one organizations submitted a letter to the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations subcommittees supporting funding for the ARRI program. We were glad to see the House of Representatives include \$500,000 for ARRI for the first time ever in their proposed FY 2025 bill, but unfortunately this funding was not passed into law following the full fiscal year extension of FY 2024 funding levels. Increased reforestation of former mine lands reduces erosion, restores habitat for local wildlife and protects communities from increased runoff that exacerbates flooding. Congress should provide federal funding to improve OSMRE's ability to adequately reforest mine lands for public and commercial usage while also restoring the landscape's natural features.
3. **Allocate \$100,000 for OSMRE to conduct a "stress test"** for the largest coal surety providers and state-administered bond pools. The structure of a bond pool works similarly to an insurance policy, allowing coal companies to pay less for each required reclamation bond by spreading the risk of actually needing the bond to cover reclamation across multiple mine permits. However, when a surety covers multiple permits owned by a single coal company, the risk of "overdrawing" funds from the bond pool when the company goes bankrupt and the financial responsibility of reclamation falling to taxpayers increases. Congress should direct OSMRE to perform a stress test, as is often done in the financial sector to assess risk, of the largest coal surety providers and report on the financial liabilities for taxpayers if coal company bankruptcies create a "run" on bond pools, creating a choice between abandoning reclamation efforts or bailing out the coal company with taxpayer funds.

Thank you for supporting the health, safety and economic vitality of coal mining communities. Our communities are focused on building new economic opportunities for the future, but we need Congress to support OSMRE so they can fulfill their obligations to protect our communities from reckless coal companies and mining practices while creating new job opportunities in reclamation.

Sincerely,

Appalachian Citizens' Law Center

Appalachian Voices

Appalshop

Citizens Coal Council

Climate Action PA

Christians For The Mountains

Eastern Kentucky Community Land Trust

Eastern Pennsylvania Coalition for Abandoned Mine Reclamation (EPCAMR)

FreshWater Accountability Project

Kentucky Conservation Committee

¹ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/lack-regulation-abandoned-mines-worsened-kentucky-flooding-attorneys-s-rcna41716>

Kentucky Resources Council

Kentucky Riverkeeper

Kentucky Waterways Alliance

Mid-Ohio Valley Climate Action

National Wildlife Federation

North American Climate, Conservation and Environment (NACCE)

PennFuture

ReImagine Appalachia

Rise Up WV

River Fields, Louisville, Ky

Sierra Club Kentucky Chapter

SOCM-Statewide Organizing for Community eMpowerment

Three Rivers Waterkeeper

TRAFFED-RDC

West Virginia Environmental Council

West Virginia Rivers Coalition