



La Plata County
Colorado

Board of County Commissioners

Julie Westendorff, Chair • Gwen Lachelt, Vice Chair • Bradford P. Blake, Commissioner

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Durango, CO 81301
(970) 382-6219

February 28, 2017

The Honorable Scott Tipton
U.S. House of Representatives
218 Cannon HOB
Washington, D.C. 20515

Subject: Opposition to H.R. 622

Dear Congressman Tipton:

The La Plata County Board of County Commissioners and La Plata County Sheriff Sean Smith strongly oppose H.R. 622 (Local Enforcement for Local Lands Act). This bill seeks to terminate the law enforcement functions of the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management and to provide block grants to States for the enforcement Federal law on Federal land under the jurisdiction of these agencies.

We have grave reservations about this approach. As you know, La Plata County is extremely large, over 1,700 square miles, with more than 430,000 acres (nearly 657 square miles) of federal land. It is challenging enough for our Sheriff's Office to provide adequate law enforcement services to the privately owned land within our County. We are deeply concerned that any block grant from the State would not adequately cover the County's cost to provide sufficient law enforcement services on federal land. It would require a significant increase in the number of deputies to patrol these areas, and there are costs associated with increasing our law enforcement staff to accommodate the additional workload. The County would bear new and ongoing costs associated with administration of the block grants, including record keeping and reporting functions, human resources obligations with respect to any new employees, uniforms and equipment, vehicle purchase, repair and maintenance, training and more. The act only allows grant funds to be used for "law enforcement purposes," yet it does not specify what would fall within that purview.

Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, the bill seeks to impose on local law enforcement agencies responsibilities for natural resource protection, a role for which they are not trained and which is outside of their normal course of duties.

Finally, the time frame contemplated by the bill is unrealistic. It does not seem possible that, by September 30, 2017, a block program will have been worked out with the states, contracts with local governments will be in place, and local law enforcement agencies will have ramped up with the

necessary deputies, equipment, vehicles and training to take on these responsibilities by October 1, 2017.

This ill-conceived bill hits La Plata County, in particular, at a time when we are forced to cut back on our own County services due to dramatic reductions in County revenues resulting from a number of factors including the loss of critical tax revenue based on the low price of natural gas and declining production. To mandate that the State and by extension local governments take on law enforcement responsibilities is quite simply a bad idea from our perspective. Local law enforcement personnel should be focused on their primary responsibilities to maintain law and order within their jurisdiction. Therefore, for these reasons, we urge you to oppose H.R. 622.

Thank you for your consideration.

LA PLATA COUNTY
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

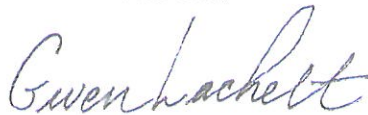

Julie Westendorff
Chair

Gwen Lachelt
Vice-Chair

Bradford P. Blake
Commissioner

LA PLATA COUNTY SHERIFF


Sean Smith





cc: U.S. Senator Michael Bennet
U.S. Senator Cory Gardner