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**Merkley, Colleagues Introduce Bipartisan Bill to Cut Red Tape and Provide Essential Services for Oregonians**

Washington, D.C. – U.S. Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR) has partnered with U.S. Senators John Cornyn (R-TX), Ruben Gallego (D-AZ), and Bernie Moreno (R-OH) to introduce the bipartisan *Special District Fairness and Accessibility Act*, codifying a formal definition of “special district” to ensure that Oregonians can access the critical local services these districts provide.

“Special districts—like the Klamath 911 Emergency Communications District and the Applegate Fire District in Oregon—provide cost-effective and efficient public services to our communities, and they deserve fair access to federal funding and resources,” **said Merkley.** “Our bipartisan bill levels the playing field for special districts by ensuring they are eligible to receive federal dollars for their work to support critical infrastructure and essential services, including parks, irrigation, sanitation, fire protection, ports, health care, electricity, and libraries.”

While special districts are intended to be eligible for federal grants and other assistance, many special districts were unintentionally excluded from receiving federal aid during the pandemic due to the lack of clarity in current law. The bipartisan *Special District Fairness and Accessibility Act* will provide needed clarity for federal agencies administering grant funds, so they are better able to support special districts, and the communities they serve, with everything from infrastructure improvements to disaster recovery assistance and more.

Congressman Pat Fallon (R-TX-04) also introduced companion legislation in the House. The bipartisan *Special District Fairness and Accessibility Act*has garnered over 25,000 supporters and is endorsed by the National Special Districts Association, the Special Districts Association of Oregon (SDAO) and the newly formed Texas Special District Coalition (TSDC) , among many others nationally.

"The National Special Districts Association (NSDA) applauds Senators Cornyn and Merkley for introducing the *Special District Fairness and Accessibility Act*,” **said Ann Terry, Chair of NSDA and Chief Executive Officer of the Special District Association of Colorado.**“Special districts provide essential public services to millions of Americans, including fire protection and emergency services, clean water, public transit, hospital, parks and recreation, airport, natural resource conservation, and many more. The bipartisan *Special District Fairness and Accessibility Act* would establish a formal definition of 'special district' in federal law and ensure that special districts across the nation are eligible to receive all appropriate forms of federal financial assistance. NSDA is extremely grateful to Senators Cornyn and Merkley for their strong leadership on behalf of special districts and we look forward to working together to ensure that this critically important piece of legislation is enacted into law.”

"The Special Districts Association of Oregon (SDAO) extends our sincere gratitude to Senator Merkley for his leadership in sponsoring and supporting the *Special District Fairness and Accessibility Act* (S. 2014)," **said Frank Stratton, the Executive Director of the SDAO.** "Oregon’s special districts play a vital role in delivering essential services to communities across the state, and this legislation represents a significant step toward ensuring equitable access to federal resources. Senator Merkley’s commitment to fairness and accessibility will help strengthen the ability of Oregon’s nearly 1,000 special districts to serve Oregonians effectively. We appreciate his continued advocacy and dedication to supporting local governance and our communities."

Full text of the *Special District Fairness and Accessibility Act* can be found by clicking [here](https://www.merkley.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/Special-District-Fairness-and-Accessibility-Act.pdf).

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