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**NSDA Federal Advocacy Committee**

**Summary and call to action**

**9.25.2025**

Welcome & Introductions

Ann Terry (SDACO) opened the meeting and welcomed participants.  
Joe Krahn (Paragon Government Affairs) introduced Jeffrey Thorsby as the new NSDA lead and team member. Thorsby brings significant experience in legislative affairs and local government, having served as Chief of Staff for the Nevada County Board of Supervisors. Both Ann Terry and Joe Krahn expressed excitement about his contributions.

Legislative & Federal Advocacy Updates

1. Foundational Bill – H.R. 2766 / S. 2014

Status: Pending in Congress after summer recess.

Key Priorities:

* Soliciting Additional Cosponsors: Top priority. Advocacy committee members are asked to re-engage their state delegations.
* Target States: Special attention needed in states with low co-sponsorship.
* Notable Champions: Positive movement in California and Oregon.
* Challenges:
  + Senator Rand Paul’s Office: Engagement remains difficult; support from Kentucky stakeholders is critical.
  + Staff Turnover: High turnover in the lead sponsor's office is slowing momentum.
  + Outreach needed to previous "no" votes in the House to rebuild support.

Call to Action:

* Reach out again to congressional offices from your state.
* Specific ask: Co-sponsorship of H.R. 2766 / S. 2014.

2. Strategic Engagement Opportunities

* Senator Lankford (OK): Kyle Packham flagged an October 23 breakfast event in Washington, D.C. NSDA presence recommended.
* Senator Thune (SD): Mustafa Hessabi raised concerns about lack of feedback. Kyle Packham offered to initiate outreach through a personal connection. Joe Krahn supported this and emphasized email outreach with clear co-sponsorship asks.

Government Funding & Appropriations

3. FY 2026 Appropriations and Continuing Resolution (CR)

* Shutdown Risk: A federal government shutdown appears imminent.
* Current Status:
  + House passed a clean CR through November 21st, but the Senate rejected it due to disagreements (especially on health care provisions).
  + No bipartisan discussions have taken place—raising concerns about duration and services impacted.

4. Medicaid & Health Care Funding

* Senate Republicans: Opposing inclusion of Medicaid provisions in CR.
* Impact on Hospitals: Tom Joseph flagged potential Medicaid disruptions for rural hospitals if shutdown occurs.
* Political Context: Democrats struggling for leverage; Schumer pushing for health care provisions.

Issue-Specific Updates

5. FEMA Reform Proposal

* Overview: Proposal to elevate FEMA to cabinet-level status and shift its funding model from reimbursement to grants.
* Support: Bipartisan backing in committee, only a few dissenting votes.
* NSDA Action Item: Support letter requested—Hasan Sarsour will draft and circulate for committee input.

6. U.S. Wildland Firefighting Service Agency

* Update:
  + Initiative to consolidate federal wildfire forces into a single agency under the Department of the Interior.
  + Timeline:
    - Interior implementation by January
    - Forest Service reforms by April

7. Fire Apparatus Crisis

* Senate Hearing Summary:
  + Significant backlogs and rising costs in fire engine production.
  + Market dominated by two companies controlling ~80%.
  + Senator Josh Hawley calling for investigations into monopolistic behavior.
  + Jeffrey Thorsby emphasized legislative interest in addressing the issue.

Cybersecurity & Rural Health

8. State and Local Cybersecurity Grant Program (SLCGP) – H.R. 5078 (PILLAR Act)

* Urgency: Program expires September 30, 2025.
* Proposal: Reauthorize through FY 2035.
  + Estimated cost: $766 million over next five years.
  + Includes provisions for in-kind contributions.
* Action Item: NSDA to send support letter to special districts—template to be circulated.

9. CMS Rural Health Transformation Grant Program

* Overview: $50 billion over 5 years for rural healthcare providers affected by Medicaid cuts.
* Deadline for States: November 5, 2025
* NSDA Engagement: Monitor and support state-level applications.

Planning & Next Steps

10. 2026 Federal Advocacy Agenda

* Timeline:
  + September: Committee provides feedback for initial 2026 draft by Oct 10th.
  + October: Review and approve version 1.
  + Annual Meeting: Board of Directors to adopt 2026 agenda.
  + October Advocacy Meeting: Kickoff for 5-Year Policy Agenda process.
* Action Item:
  + Chantal Unfug to compile feedback and circulate by October 10.
  + Chantal will also invite Clark to present on 5-year policy development at the October meeting.

Next Meeting

Date: October 23, 2025

Summary of Action Items

| Item | Responsible Party | Deadline |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Contact state delegations for co-sponsorship (H.R. 2766/S.2014) | All committee members | ASAP |
| Support letter for FEMA reform bill | Hasan Sarsour → Committee review | Before Oct meeting |
| Support letter for H.R. 5078 (Cybersecurity) | Paragon → Distribution | Before Sept 30 |
| Compile 2026 agenda feedback | Chantal Unfug | October 10 |
| Invite Clark to present at Oct meeting | Chantal Unfug | Before Oct 23 |

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**Federal Advocacy Program**

**2025**

**Objectives**

* **Advocate** on Federal Policy and Funding
  + - Influence federal legislative and regulatory actions as the voice for all special districts
    - Promote special district access to federal funding opportunities
    - **Access Funding**
    - Ensure awareness and readiness to compete for funding opportunities
    - Track, communicate, and support federal funding opportunities
* **Communicate** the Value of Special Districts
  + - Increase awareness and understanding of special districts and NSDA among federal policymakers and the greater public
    - Strengthen relationships with partner advocacy organizations
* **Educate** NSDA Members to be Effective
  + Track and inform federal legislative and regulatory matters of interest to all special districts
    - Ensure awareness of federal funding opportunities and equip members to effectively compete

**Priorities for 2025/2026 (119th Congress)**

**National Definition of Special Districts/Special District Fairness and Accessibility Act**

NSDA will work with key lawmakers to advance legislation to establish a first-ever, formal definition of “special district” in federal law. This would also require the White House Office of Management and Budget to issue guidance to federal agencies requiring special districts to be recognized as local governments for the purpose of federal financial assistance determinations.

**Public Finance**

NSDA supports reinstating or expanding public financing tools that help special districts secure essential project funding. This includes reauthorizing Build America Bonds, expanding private activity bonds, restoring advance refunding bonds, and protecting the tax-exempt status of municipal bonds; it also includes active participation in the Public Finance Network on issues such as limiting costly mandates associated with the Federal Debt Transparency Act.

**U.S. Census Bureau**

After enacting the Act, NSDA will work with Congress to direct sufficient resources to the U.S. Census Bureau to ensure that special districts are accurately counted in local government data sets, which are often critical to access federal funding opportunities.

**Federal Funding Opportunities**

NSDA will work to ensure that special districts are eligible for relevant discretionary and formula-based grant opportunities. Additionally, NSDA will advocate for dedicated technical assistance funding to help special districts navigate complex application processes and deliver projects more efficiently.

**Congressional Caucus on Special Districts**

NSDA will advocate for creating a Congressional Caucus on Special Districts. The caucus would serve as a dedicated platform to educate lawmakers and federal agencies about the unique challenges and essential functions of special districts and the communities they serve across the nation.

**Additional Issues to Monitor and Report**

**Administrative Functions:**

NSDA will continue to monitor and report on policies, rules, and regulations that directly impact the administrative management of special districts. In the near term, NSDA will watch Occupational Safety and Health Agency rulemaking and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) updates.

**Cybersecurity**

NSDA supports federal programs and policies designed to bolster cybersecurity resilience through support and not through unfunded mandates. This includes advocating for initiatives that enhance threat detection, prevention, and response capabilities; promote best practices for data protection and privacy; and facilitate access to federal resources and training programs.

**Infrastructure**

NSDA supports the reauthorization of the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act* and equitable inclusion of special districts as eligible entities to ensure that essential funding continues for a broad spectrum of critical infrastructure projects. A robust reauthorization would enable ongoing improvements to water and wastewater systems, strengthen transportation networks, expand broadband access, and enhance energy resilience.

NSDA will broadly support and promote programs aimed at strengthening water infrastructure, conservation efforts, groundwater recharge, recycling, and storage solutions, and specifically water infrastructure for firefighting. Additionally, NSDA will advocate for sound policies and strategic investments to address challenges facing drought-impacted communities, major river basins, and vital watersheds.

**Permitting Reform**

NSDA will support permitting reforms that streamline regulatory processes, reduce project delays, and lower costs associated with infrastructure development and maintenance, while maintaining a balanced approach that respects environmental protections.

**Disaster Resilience, Readiness, Response, and Recovery**

NSDA supports strengthening the resilience of special districts and the communities they serve. This includes advocating for federal programs and initiatives that would improve disaster preparedness and response, support local emergency management needs, and provide resources for infrastructure hardening, risk assessment, and recovery efforts.

NSDA supports policies and partnerships with stakeholders to advance shared goals for all disaster-impacted and disaster-prone special districts. NSDA also endorses policies that provide federal land management agencies with enhanced tools to facilitate effective forest management, forest restoration, and post-fire and water quality mitigation efforts.

**Farm Bill**

NSDA supports the timely reauthorization of the Farm Bill to sustain essential programs that strengthen rural development, enhance water infrastructure, promote conservation efforts, and improve disaster resilience.

**NSDA Strategy: Building Support for the *Special District Fairness and Accessibility Act***

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

The *Special District Fairness and Accessibility Act* (H.R. 2766) was introduced by Rep. Pat Fallon (R-TX) on April 9, 2025. Currently, there are fourteen (14) cosponsors of the bill from California, Oregon, Colorado and Washington  as follows: Rep. Brittany Pettersen (D-CO & Democratic co-lead of the legislation); Rep. David Valadao (R-CA); Rep. Young Kim (R-CA); Rep. Doug LaMalfa (R-CA); Rep. Dan Newhouse (R-WA); Rep. Jay Obernolte (R-CA); Rep. Josh Harder (D-CA):  Rep. Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR);  Rep. Raul Ruiz (D-CA); Rep. Andrea Salinas (D-OR); Rep. Val T. Hoyle (D-OR); Rep. George Whitesides (D-CA); Rep. Ken Calvert (R-CA); and Rep. Janelle Bynum (D-OR).

Because Republicans control the House, a key objective for NSDA is garnering additional GOP cosponsors/supporters of the legislation. In particular, NSDA and its membership will be working to secure support from members of the House Freedom Caucus (HFC). It should be noted that Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee (HSGAC) Chairman Rand Paul (R-KY) - who prevented the special district bill from advancing in the Senate last year - closely aligns himself with the members of the HFC. In fact, Senator Paul indicated that it was HFC opposition to the bill that swayed his views and opinion of the legislation.

To follow are the members of the House who voted **against**last year's version of the special district definition bill, known as the *Special District Grant Accessibility Act* (H.R. 7525). Note: "\*" indicates HFC Member. **Special districts that are located in any of these Member's Congressional Districts should work to secure the support of their Member.** This would include sending the previous advocacy letter to their delegate member, and forwarding to us so that we can follow-up with the applicable office. It is critical that members hear from tehri constituents directly to have the most impact.

Alabama

Rep. Barry Moore (R-AL)\*

Arizona

Rep. Andy Biggs (R-AZ)\*

Rep. Eli Crane (R-AZ)\*

Rep. Paul Gosar (R-AZ)\*

Colorado

Rep. Lauren Boebert (R-CO)\*

Florida

Rep. Kat Cammack (R-FL)

Rep. Byron Donalds (R-FL)

Rep. Cory Mills (R-FL)

Georgia

Rep. Andrew Clyde (R-GA)\*

Rep. Mike Collins (R-GA)\*

Rep. Majorie Taylor Greene (R-GA)

Kentucky

Rep. Thomas Massie (R-KY)

Ohio

Rep. Warren Davidson (R-OH)

Rep. Jim Jordan (R-OH)\*

Oklahoma

Rep. Josh Brecheen (R-OK)\*

Rep. Kevin Hern (R-OK)

Pennsylvania

Rep. Scott Perry (R-PA)\*

South Carolina

Rep. Ralph Norman (R-SC)\*

Tennessee

Rep. Tim Burchett (R-TN)

Rep. Andy Ogles (R-TN)\*

Texas

Rep. Michael Cloud (R-TX)\*

Rep. Chip Roy (R-TX)\*

Virginia

Rep. Ben Cline (R-VA)\*

Notably, the following HFC Members voted in **favor**of H.R. 7525. Special districts that are located in these Member's Congressional Districts should remind their Members that they voted in favor of the bill in the previous Congress, thank them for their past support, and urge them to once again vote in favor of the legislation when it comes to the House floor.

Alabama

Rep. Gary Palmer (R-AL)

Florida

Rep. Greg Steube (R-FL)

Idaho

Rep. Russ Fulcher (R-ID)

Illinois

Rep. Mary Miller - (R-IL)

Louisiana

Rep. Clay Higgins (R-LA)

Missouri

Rep. Eric Burlison (R-MO)

Tennessee

Rep. Diana Hashbarger (R-TN)

Rep. Scott DesJarlais (R-TN)

Rep. Mark Green (R-TN)

Texas

Rep. Keith Self (R-TX)

Virginia

Rep. Morgan Griffith (R-VA)

Wisconsin

Rep. Tom Tiffany (R-WI)

Note: Rep. Andy Harris (R-MD), the current chair of the HFC, did *not*cast a vote on H.R. 7525 when it was on the House floor last year.

U.S. SENATE

Senators John Cornyn (R-TX) and Jeff Merkley (D-OR) introduced Senate bill S. 2014 on June 10, 2025 as  a companion bill to H.R. 2766. Currently S. 2014 has three (3) co-sponsors that include Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-OR); Sen. Bernie Moreno (R-OH); and Sen. Ruben Gallego (D-AZ).

Before doing so, the senators are working with NSDA and special districts to identify a Republican Member of HSGAC who would be willing to be an original cosponsor of the bill. Because HSGAC has jurisdiction over the *Special District Fairness and Accessibility Act*, securing a HSGAC Republican sponsor is key.

To follow are the Republican Members of HSGAC (NOT including Chairman Rand Paul), in order of seniority. Special districts in these states should urge their senator to cosponsor the forthcoming legislation. \*\*\* indicates that they are already a co-sponsor.

Senator Ron Johnson (R-WI)

Senator James Lankford (R-OK)

Senator Rick Scott (R-FL) - NSDA member state

Senator Josh Hawley (R-MO)

Senator Bernie Moreno (R-OH)\*\*\*

Senator Joni Ernst (R-IA)

Senator Ashley Moody (R-FL) - NSDA member state

Let me know if you have any questions. Thanks.