



# AppalachianVoices

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The Honorable Thomas Carper  
Chair  
Committee on Environment and  
Public Works  
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Sam Graves  
Chair  
Committee on Transportation and  
Infrastructure  
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Environment and Public  
Works  
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Rick Larsen  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Transportation and  
Infrastructure  
U.S. House of Representatives

December 6, 2024

## **Subject: Support for the Water Resources Development Act of 2024 and Economic Development Administration Reauthorization**

Dear Chairman Carper, Ranking Member Capito, Chairman Graves, and Ranking Member Larsen:

Appalachian Voices writes to express strong support for S. 4367, the Thomas R. Carper Water Resources Development Act of 2024, as amended on December 3 and agreed to by your remarkable leadership teams.

Appalachian Voices is a regional nonprofit supporting the economic and environmental recovery of Appalachian coal mining communities. Throughout Kentucky, North Carolina, Ohio, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia, we work with community organizations, local government, state governments, businesses, and other stakeholders to reclaim abandoned mine lands, remediate pollution from coal mines, build new clean energy projects, and secure funding for economic development and job training initiatives.

As coal mining continues to decline, Appalachian mining communities grapple with declining tax revenues, loss of population, abandoned coal mines and associated pollution and [increased flood risk](#), lagging wages and high unemployment. While Congress has made significant progress in recent years toward supporting recovery in these places, there is still much work to be done.



S. 4367 makes critical investments in our communities by:

- **Focusing on supporting coal communities.** S. 4367 updates Economic Development Administration (EDA) guidance to support coal communities with technical assistance programs and authorizes \$75 million per year in dedicated funding for coal communities.
- **Investing in renewable energy on brownfield sites.** Brownfields present an excellent energy development opportunity by turning contaminated land back into productive use. Renewable energy development on former industrial sites improves air quality and creates jobs in areas that have lost industrial jobs. The bill expands the expired “brightfields” demonstration program to additional renewable energy technologies beyond solar, and authorizes \$5 million per year for the program.
- **Establishing the Office of Disaster Recovery and Resilience at EDA.** The central and southern Appalachia region was devastated by the impacts of Hurricane Helene this fall, causing [\\$250 billion in infrastructure and economic damages](#). Our region needs a long-term focus from the federal government to support our regional economic recovery, and this new EDA office will provide the necessary resources to build our communities back from this disaster more resilient than ever. Additional language in the legislation that authorizes EDA to consider resilience and extreme weather will help prepare our communities for the expected future of increased precipitation across the region.
- **Allowing EDA funds to be used for hiring local personnel to provide much needed capacity in identifying, applying for, and administering federal, state, and philanthropic grants.** Small, rural communities across Appalachia and the United States [struggle with maintaining capacity](#) for participating in grant programs. These communities have small budgets and may only have a few staff members or even operate entirely with part-time staff. By allowing EDA grant funding to go toward hiring staff, small, rural communities will be able to compete with well-paid consultants from wealthier communities in ways that will guarantee grant investments go to the people who need them most.
- **Authorizing a financial assistance pilot program for abandoned mine drainage treatment in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia.** [Abandoned mine drainage](#) is a major source of pollution for local waterways, killing river ecosystems that provide recreation, fishing, and drinking water sources. It is extremely expensive to repair this historical damage by coal companies that are no longer responsible

for abandoned mines, and this financial assistance program will expedite the recovery of our landscape for the public benefit.

**We urge Congress to pass S. 4367 as a promise to Appalachian communities that the federal government is invested in our success.** The resource extraction economy has left our Appalachian communities scarred and looking for new economic opportunities. EDA is a trusted partner in building a new, resilient regional economy that will allow our communities to thrive. This reauthorization will give businesses and governments the certainty needed to make life changing investments in the region.

Furthermore, as President-elect Trump's Department of Government Efficiency prepares to take aim at federal programs lacking authorization, Congress must pass this legislation to protect the value of EDA's model of federally-supported, locally-driven economic development for all communities.

We applaud the bipartisan and bicameral effort to construct this legislative package, and we look forward to informing all members of Congress about the impacts these investments have in our region.

Sincerely,

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