

La Plata County
Colorado

Board of County Commissioners

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

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February 29, 2016

Members of the House Local Government Committee
Colorado State Capitol
200 E. Colfax
Denver, CO 80203

Dear Members of the House:

Thank you for providing La Plata County the opportunity to speak in support of SB 16-063, Concerning the Authority of a Local Government to Enter into an Intergovernmental Agreement with an Out-of-State Local Government to Provide Critical Public Services.

La Plata County brought this bill to CCI as a priority. We have been working through Eric Bergman with Senator Roberts and we support this bill.

As you know, under Colorado law, counties do not have powers that are not specifically granted to them by state statute. Authority does not currently exist to allow counties to make meaningful agreements to provide emergency services with counties or municipalities in adjoining states. This bill fixes that.

While La Plata County was already aware of the need for this power, the Gold King Mine spill of August, 2015 brought the issue to the forefront. The mine accident dumped 3 million gallons of heavy-metal-laden mine sludge into the Animas River. The toxic plume flowed from San Juan County, Colorado, through La Plata County, into San Juan County, New Mexico, and through the cities of Aztec and Farmington on its way to the San Juan River and Lake Powell. That environmental emergency highlighted La Plata County's connection to our New Mexico neighbors and it highlighted our need for agreements with each other in the event of emergencies.

Geographically and topographically, La Plata County and other Southwest Colorado counties are largely separated from other parts of Colorado. Northwest New Mexico is, therefore, a valuable neighbor. With San Juan County, New Mexico's, population of 126,000 people, they have valuable emergency service resources, in manpower, equipment, and expertise, to help La Plata County and our small municipalities in the event of emergency. Likewise, La Plata County (though smaller) has assets that can assist our New Mexico neighbors in time of crisis. Our common experience with the river, wildfire, and the coalbed methane industry make us natural partners in mutual aid. At this time, however, we are

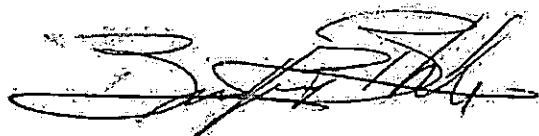
not permitted to enter into direct and meaningful agreements with neighboring New Mexico jurisdictions.

New Mexico allows its counties to make agreements with Colorado counties. The obstacle to our effecting mutual aid agreements in emergencies is limited by Colorado law. San Juan County, NM, and its municipalities would like to enter intergovernmental agreements regarding emergency services with La Plata County, and we would like to do the same.

We, the La Plata County Commissioners, respectfully ask the committee to allow us to build resilience and public safety for our citizens. Please pass this bill and permit us to work with our New Mexico neighbors.

Best Regards,

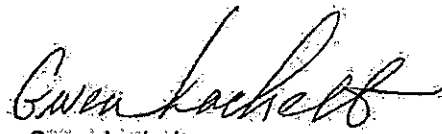
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