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Sinema Introduces Bipartisan Legislation Ensuring Arizona Special Districts May Access Federal Funds More Fairly

*Senator's legislation is a result of direct conversations she has had with
Arizonans about federal support for special districts*

WASHINGTON – Arizona senior Senator Kyrsten Sinema, alongside Republican Senator John Cornyn (Texas), introduced the *Special District Grant Accessibility Act* – bipartisan legislation ensuring Arizona special districts have equal access federal financial assistance to improve community safety and delivery of essential services. U.S. Representatives Pat Fallon (R-Texas) and Brittany Pettersen (D-Colo.) introduced companion legislation in the U.S. House.

“Special districts provide important services to Arizona communities – including firefighting, public utilities, and infrastructure. Our bipartisan, bicameral legislation ensures Arizona special districts can more fairly access federal funds as other parts of the government,” said Sinema.

“Special districts throughout Texas struggle to compete for federal grants that provide critical funds for transportation, infrastructure, and emergency services,” said Cornyn. **“Recognizing these districts as local government entities would help boost access to federal funding opportunities, ensuring that smaller communities aren’t left behind.”**

“We are thankful for Senator Sinema’s continued leadership in introducing the Special District Grant Accessibility Act,” said Judy Begay, Chair of the Coconino County Board of Supervisors and District 4 Supervisor. **“This bill will ensure that special districts, providers of critical infrastructure and services throughout Arizona, are included as eligible for federal grants. The bill provides a standard definition of ‘special district’ to foster consistency in reference and recognition across federal government programs intended for these essential units of local governments.”**

“We thank Senators Sinema and Cornyn for their leadership and commitment to equal access to federal support for special. Their continued efforts to aid America’s Fire Districts is vitally important as we have been previously excluded from all federal relief funding, when our communities needed us more than ever. Our agencies are on the front lines every day, running towards danger to keep our communities safe. As costs related to responding

to fires and providing emergency medical care continue to rise, this creates additional strain to already tight budgets. With Senators Sinema and Cornyn’s assistance, we will be able to ensure our operations do not falter,” said Scott A Freitag, Fire Chief, Central Arizona Fire and Medical, Immediate Past President, Arizona Fire Chiefs Association.

“The Arizona Special Districts Alliance applauds the bipartisan Special District Grant Accessibility Act for its establishment of a federal definition of ‘special district’,” said Sara Carroll, Arizona Special Districts Alliance Administrator. **“Arizona’s special districts providing critical and essential services such as fire protection, drinking water, healthcare, irrigation, and more, have historically experienced higher barriers to access federally-sourced funding opportunities for local government services. The legislation would begin breaking down these barriers with the definition and setting our local special district governments on a more level playing field as other local units of government. Doing so will further special districts’ investment in essential services that millions of Arizonans rely on across urban, rural, and wildland urban interface communities. The Arizona Special Districts Alliance thanks Senator Sinema for her leadership and championship to fix this public policy issue.”**

“Arizona’s fire districts are integral to emergency response all across the state, but have had to fight harder for access to funding opportunities afforded to fellow governments,” said John Flynn, Arizona Fire Districts Association Executive Director. **“The Special District Grant Accessibility Act is the solution to this problem, and will place Arizona’s districts providing a lifeline to millions on a more level playing field with fellow municipal agencies, and helping our districts deliver the best emergency services possible.”**

“I thank Senators Sinema and Cornyn for introducing this legislation,” said Fire Chief John S. Butler, Fairfax County, VA and International Association of Fire Chiefs President and Board Chair. **“Across the nation, fire districts protect their communities from fires, medical emergencies, natural disasters, and other incidents. It is important that their unique status be recognized by Washington, so that they can benefit from federal policies and programs.”**

“On behalf of the many special park districts represented within the National Recreation and Park Association’s membership, we support the introduction of the Special District Grant Accessibility Act by Senators Sinema and Cornyn. This bipartisan, bicameral legislation will provide a commonsense solution to ensure a level playing field for special district access to funding opportunities relative to local government entities that provide similar critical services for their communities. NRPA urges the swift passage of this bill in the Senate and applauds the House of Representatives for passing companion legislation led by Representatives Pat Fallon and Brittany Pettersen this spring,” said Kyle Simpson, Director of Government Affairs, National Recreation and Park Association.

“The nation’s special fire, ambulance and emergency districts have long-been no stranger to the hardship of accessing federal funding for local government and emergency services, placing them at a disadvantaged compared to sister government agencies to access resources to provide quality services in their communities,” said Cole Arreola-Karr, National

Association of Emergency and Fire Officials (NAEFO) Executive Director. **“NAEFO applauds Senators Sinema and Cornyn for their bipartisan championship of the Special District Grant Accessibility Act, which will finally set fire, ambulance, and other special districts on a level playing field breakdown these barriers for the 6,000 districts providing emergency services to tens of millions of Americans every day.”**

“Public health mosquito control districts support the health, comfort, welfare, and prosperity of local residents and are vital parts of the nation's public health infrastructure. Much of this important work has long been done through the activities of special districts formed to combat local and invasive disease-transmitting mosquitoes. This legislation will bolster our special district members ability to detect and combat these problems and protect the public. On behalf of our special district members, the AMCA fully endorses the Special Districts Grant Accessibility Act,” said Dr. Rui-De Xue, President of the American Mosquito Control Association.

“The National Special Districts Coalition (NSDC) is grateful to Senators Sinema and Cornyn for their longstanding leadership on behalf of the nation's special districts,” said Ann Terry, Chair of NSDC 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 Grant Accessibility Act would codify in federal law a long-overdue, formal definition of special district and ensure that the more than 35,000 special districts nationwide are eligible to receive all appropriate forms of federal financial assistance. NSDC looks forward to working with Senators Sinema and Cornyn, as well as our special district partners in Arizona and Texas, to ensure that this critically important piece of legislation passes the Senate.”**

Special districts are a political subdivision of a state and deliver specialized services to a specific community that would otherwise not be provided. Sinema and Cornyn’s legislation builds on previous work in defining “special districts” under law to ensure these entities have equitable access to federal funding opportunities.

Additionally, Sinema and Cornyn’s bipartisan and bicameral legislation directs the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to issue guidance to federal agencies regarding treatment of special districts and report on agency compliance with published guidance.

In Arizona, there are over 300 special districts, employing over 14,500 Arizonans, that provide essential services including firefighting, public utilities, and infrastructure. Special districts have struggled to access federal funds for infrastructure projects and community programs because the U.S. Census Bureau does not consider special districts to be a unit of government – leaving special districts unable to access federal funds as easily or fairly as other parts of government that provide the same services.

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