

United States Senate

March 16, 2021

Mr. Rob Fairweather
Acting Director
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Mr. Fairweather,

I am writing to express my concern about the proposed definition changes of a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) and how they would affect many Western states. These adjustments will have an outsized effect on less-populous rural states like Montana. I will not let any community in Montana get lost in the shuffle of Washington, DC's bureaucracy.

As you are aware, the Census Bureau definition of "metropolitan" is an urban area with a population of 50,000 or more. This encompasses Montana's three largest cities: Billings (109,595), Missoula (73,710) and Great Falls (58,835). According to the Metropolitan and Micropolitan Statistical Area Standards Review Committee recommendations, the population benchmark would be doubled to 100,000, meaning that Missoula and Great Falls – major hubs in their areas – would be downgraded to "micropolitan." Further, my home town of Bozeman, is on the cusp of becoming metropolitan under the current standard.

The implications of this shift would be significant, as up to half of the federal funding these cities normally receive would be redirected. I urge you to not adopt this change and carefully consider what effect this will have on communities that are metropolitan centers by all reasonable measure. Great Falls is a major agricultural hub, as well as being home to the main economic development and medical facilities in North Central Montana. In Western Montana, Missoula is a major financial and academic community that has grown substantially in recent years. Bozeman is one of the fastest growing micropolitan areas in the country.

I urge you to consider that some regions grow differently than high population coastal states, and that as communities begin to stabilize from the fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic they will require continuity and stability. I request that the current delineations for an MSA remain in place.

Sincerely,



STEVE DAINES
United States Senator