Oh amaMarch 5, 2024

The Honorable Kay Granger
Chair
House Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Susan Collins
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairs Granger and Murray and Ranking Members DeLauro and Collins,

We, the undersigned members and partners of the Outdoors Alliance for Kids (OAK), urge you to ensure our nation's betterment by passing a FY24 appropriations bill that improves the health and wellness of our children and youth by expanding equitable access to the outdoors, creating jobs and career pathways for youth to enhance recreational access to and protect our public lands, and investing in resilient green infrastructure that strengthens our local economies.

OAK is a leading national alliance of more than 100 businesses and non-profit organizations representing more than 60 million individuals across the U.S., with a common interest in connecting children, youth and families with the outdoors. One-hundred million people in the U.S. - including 28 million children - do not live within walking, biking, or rolling distance of a safe park or green space. The greatest disparities in access are unsurprisingly found in Black, Indigenous, Latin American, Asian and low-income communities. Our members and supporters believe that the need for equitable opportunities to recreate and work in the outdoors has never been more apparent. Providing these opportunities will promote health and wellness and drive a sustainable outdoor recreation economy.

Beyond the proven benefits of outdoor access in promoting community health and wellness and engaging more youth in environmental stewardship, connecting youth to the outdoors is a vital part of maintaining and growing an outdoor economy. According to the Bureau of Economic Analysis, outdoor recreation annually generates $454 billion in gross economic output, comprising 1.9 percent of the United States gross domestic product (GDP). Federal investment in this sector is especially vital now to ensure the survivability and resilience of this economy.

For these reasons, we urge Congress to act include the following priorities into the House and Senate FY24 appropriations legislation:

Department of the Interior

- **Fund the Every Kid Outdoors program at $25 million.** The Every Kid Outdoors (EKO)

program provides fourth graders with a pass so they and their families can access national park sites for free for a year. Funding will be used for program staffing for the National Park Service and to cover transportation costs. Investing in EKO now will be essential in allowing agencies to provide equitable access to federal public lands.

- **Fund Youth Programs through the National Park Services at $100 million** to allow young people the experience to connect with the outdoors through national, state and local parks.

- **Fund the National Parks Service to build a more equitable National Park System at an amount of $32 million .** This would fund efforts to expand tribal co-stewardship of national parks, address transportation barriers for underserved communities, improve accessibility for people with disabilities, and construct the newly established African American Burial Grounds Preservation Program.

- **Fund the National Parks Service for the Increasing Representation in Our Public Lands initiative at an amount of $10 million,** a program that would preserve important places that tell the stories of those who have been historically underrepresented.

- **Provide robust funding to the Department of the Interior land management agencies to fund the work of the Civilian Climate Corps.** This funding will enable the agency to scale up the existing network of Service and Conservation Corps and other qualifying organizations, and engage young adults and recent veterans in conservation, climate change remediation and sustainable infrastructure jobs.

- **Provide $135 million for the Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership program.** This vital infusion of significant funding into the development of urban parks and green spaces will improve public access, decrease urban heat islands, and increase quality of life for the over 100 million people in the U.S., including 28 million children, that do not have a quality park or green space close to home.

- **Provide $900 million for the Lands and Water Conservation Fund**, supporting interagency efforts to conserve public lands, preserve working lands and culturally important sites, and meet the recreation needs of communities all over.

- **Provide $13.8 million to the National Park Service to fund the work of the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program** to bring the expertise of over a century of land management to the greater conservation and recreation community.

<u>Department of Labor</u>

- **Provide $20 million to the Department of Labor** to partner with AmeriCorps and other agencies to establish a Civilian Climate Corps program with the intent to help

communities address the climate crisis through job training programs in the emerging clean energy industry.

Department of Agriculture

- **Provide robust funding to the Department of Agriculture's U.S. Forest Service to fund the work of the Civilian Climate Corps.** This funding will enable the agency to scale up the existing network of Service and Conservation Corps and other qualifying organizations and engage young adults and recent veterans in conservation, climate change remediation and sustainable infrastructure jobs.

- **Fund the U.S. Forest Service at $42 million for the Urban and Community Forestry Program,** a program that delivers nature-based solutions for climate, environmental justice and green jobs.

Department of Health and Human Services

- **Fund the Drowning Prevention Program at the Centers for Disease Prevention and Control at $5 million to prevent drownings**. Drownings are the leading cause of accidental deaths among our youngest children (ages 0-4) and states have seen increased rates of drowning deaths during the COVID-19 crisis. Funding is for proven drowning prevention programs with national organizations working with underserved youth, support for state drowning surveillance efforts and a national plan on water safety.

- **Fund the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at $130 million for their Division for Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity.** DNPAO leads national efforts to prevent chronic illness by encouraging good nutrition and regular physical activity, and includes the Active People Healthy Nation initiative which aims to help 27 million Americans become more physically active by 2027.

Department of Commerce

- **Fund the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration for $12 million for the Bay-Watershed Education and Training program** to provide increased watershed education for students in K-12 education.
- **Provide $8 million to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to fund the NOAA Office of Education.** NOAA's Office of Education provides scholarships and grants, and collaborates with universities and organizations, among other work to promote NOAA science in school settings.

Environmental Protection Agency

- **Fund the Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Environmental Education at**

$14 million to provide people from all backgrounds with practical applications for science, technology, engineering and math that enable them to make informed decisions and take responsible action to protect their health and build strong communities.

Department of Transportation

- **Provide funding for the Department of Transportation in the amount of $200 million for the Active Transportation program**, which encourages people to include physical activity in their daily routine through exercise or as part of their transportation options. Active Transportation does that through improved biking and walking paths, improved public transportation options, and increased mixed-use neighborhoods.

Sincerely,

National Recreation and Parks Association

American Hiking Society

NewTreks

Seed Your Future

City Parks Alliance

Maine Environmental Education Association

American Society of Landscape Architects

Safe Routes Partnership

Brown People Camping

KABOOM!

Trust for Public Lands

Pacific Education Institute

YMCA of the USA

Student Conservation Association

The Corps Network

Latino Outdoors

Boys & Girls Club of America

The Wilderness Society

Greening Youth Foundation

Sierra Club