

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 15, 2024

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Chairman
Senate Subcommittee on Interior,
Environment, and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Ranking Member
Senate Subcommittee on Interior,
Environment, and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Merkley and Ranking Member Murkowski:

As the Subcommittee develops the Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, we ask that you provide at least \$125 million for the Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership (ORLP), equal to the President's Budget request. With this funding, the National Park Service could award dozens of grants to communities around the country to improve outdoor recreation infrastructure, revitalize local economies, and enhance the quality of life in neighborhoods.

Parks and green space have always played an essential role in our communities, providing health, economic, and environmental benefits. There is a tremendous need for outdoor recreational opportunities in the communities where most Americans live, work, and play. Parks play an essential role in communities, employing nearly 1.1 million jobs in 2021, generating over \$201 billion in economic activity as well as providing critical emotional and physical health benefits. Providing consistent funding for the ORLP would ensure these parks continue to promote community health, economic wellness, and outdoor recreation opportunities throughout the country.

The ORLP, a competitive grant program, complements the traditional State and Local Assistance Program through a nationally competitive process that focuses on the outdoor recreation needs of communities in ways that will encourage people to connect with the outdoors. Priority is given to shovel-ready projects involving public-private partnerships, underserved communities, and those that provide youth with employment or job training opportunities. This initiative leverages non-taxpayer dollars by awarding matching grants at a minimum 1:1 ratio and allows states to put forward the projects they believe best meet the outdoor recreation needs of their communities.

Since its inception in 2014, over ninety-six projects have been awarded more than \$118 million in federal funds, with more than \$137 million in support from local governments, private firms, and non-profit organizations. The National Park Service is currently reviewing applications for the seventh round of ORLP grants. In its short existence, the ORLP has improved accessibility of playgrounds, created parks on former brownfield sites and industrial lands, and developed dual-use spaces for recreation and green infrastructure stormwater management that builds resilient communities. These parks also improve climate resilience in cities by increasing tree canopy in and helping lower temperatures by 6 degrees to combat the "urban heat island effect," and provide much needed shade to communities.

We urge the Subcommittee to provide at least \$125 million for the ORLP to support highly leveraged investments for top-priority close-to-home outdoor spaces and recreational opportunities. As this program is included as part of the overall funding for the LWCF State and Local Assistance Program, we ask the Subcommittee to ensure that continued funding for the ORLP initiative is provided in addition to robust funding for the formula grants to the states for conservation and outdoor recreation.

We thank you for considering our request, and we look forward to working with the Subcommittee.

Sincerely,



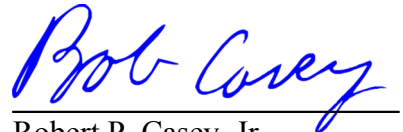
Alex Padilla
United States Senator



John Hickenlooper
United States Senator



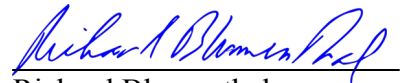
Sheldon Whitehouse
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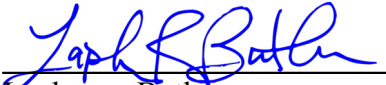
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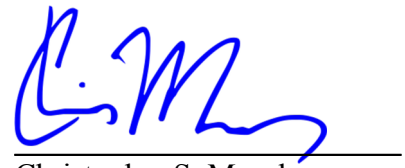
Tammy Duckworth
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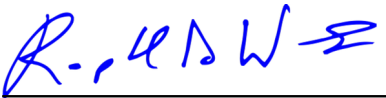
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