

June 28, 2021

United States Senate	The Hon. Madeleine Dean	The Hon. Lloyd Smucker
The Hon. Robert Casey	The Hon. Mary Gay	The Hon. Fred Keller
The Hon. Patrick Toomey	Scanlon	The Hon. John Joyce
	The Hon. Chrissy	The Hon. Guy
United States House of	Houlahan	Reschenthaler
Representatives	The Hon. Susan Wild	The Hon. Glenn Thompson
The Hon. Brian Fitzpatrick	The Hon. Matt Cartwright	The Hon. Mike Kelly
The Hon. Brendan Boyle	The Hon. Dan Meuser	The Hon. Conor Lamb
The Hon. Dwight Evans	The Hon. Scott Perry	The Hon. Mike Doyle

Dear Members of the Pennsylvania State Congressional Delegation:

On behalf of Mayors across the State of Pennsylvania, we strongly support increasing available funding for parks and recreation, and urge you to include robust funding for local parks and recreation areas as infrastructure spending is considered in Congress.

Just as America's great outdoors have never been more in demand than they have been during the pandemic, the consequences of park inequities—for our health, resilience, and prosperity—have never been more acute. COVID-19 is a wake-up call: the time to address the long-standing gaps in outdoor access and quality has come.

During the pandemic, more than 9 in 10 Pennsylvanians participated in at least some outdoor recreation activity in the past year, and our cities saw use increases among more racially and ethnically diverse populations. Even while most new outdoor participants plan to continue these activities well after the pandemic, our cities face shortages in providing close-to-home access to high quality outdoor and recreational spaces.

Nearly half of Pennsylvanians currently lack close-to-home outdoor recreation access (a park, trail, or public open space within a 10-minute walk of their home). At the State level, requests for funding to assist local governments and recreation and conservation organizations have increased more than 60% since 2011 (from \$65 million in 2011 to over \$100 million in 2020), and the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources is only able to fund up to 3 of every 5 applications.

We are urging Congress to invest in our local community health and economic recovery by investing in local parks and recreation, and specifically asking for the inclusion of \$500 million for parks in an infrastructure package. A \$500 million investment would meaningfully reduce longstanding park inequities, help fill parks and recreation gaps in communities across the state, and be put to immediate use supporting jobs at 1,000 targeted, locally prioritized park sites across the country.

In addition to vital social, physical, and mental health benefits, parks provide significant jobs and economic benefits. In Pennsylvania alone, outdoor recreation annually provides \$29.1 billion in consumer spending, 251,000 direct jobs, \$8.6 billion in wages and salaries, and \$1.9 billion in

state and local tax revenue. According to The Trust for Public Land estimates, a \$500 million investment could preserve or create thousands of jobs in frontline communities while generating \$1.37 billion in economic activity around the country.

This investment will also allow critical upgrades to our green space infrastructure and help mitigate climate change. Parks improve community health and climate resilience by reducing flooding, absorbing air pollution, and filtering storm water to keep rivers and lakes cleaner. Green, shady parks also protect people from rising temperatures, and can reduce the deadly “urban heat island effect” by as much as seven degrees. Further, investing in local parks has lasting benefits for public health. Scientific research finds that parks, green space, and outdoor activity reduce anxiety, stress, and depression, and improve physical health.

This policy has rightly earned bipartisan support in the House of Representatives, best demonstrated in March with the introduction of H.R. 1678, the Parks, Jobs, and Equity Act. In addition to recent companion legislation in the Senate, S. 2258.

We believe access to the outdoors is a right that belongs to all. As Congress continues work on an infrastructure package, please include a \$500 million investment to help the economy, create jobs, invest in critical infrastructure, and address historic inequities.

Sincerely,

Mayor Ray O'Connell, City of Allentown
Mayor Matt Pacifico, City of Altoona
Mayor Robert J. Donchez, City of Bethlehem
Mayor Nickole Nesby, City of Duquesne
Mayor Sal Panto, Jr., City of Easton
Mayor Joseph Schember, City of Erie
Mayor Kimberly Doss, City of Farrell
Mayor Douglas A. Baker, City of Franklin
Mayor Frank Janakovic, City of Johnstown
Mayor Danene Sorace, City of Lancaster
Mayor Sherry Capello, City of Lebanon
Mayor Chris Frye, City of New Castle
Mayor James F. Kenney, City of Philadelphia
Mayor Bill Peduto, City of Pittsburgh
Mayor Eddie Moran, City of Reading
Mayor Paige Cagnetti, City of Scranton
Mayor Bill Gerke, City of Uniontown
Mayor Derek Slaughter, City of Williamsport
Mayor Michael R Helfrich, City of York