



February 15, 2023

Dear Senators Rolfes, Robinson, Wilson, and Gildon and Representatives Ormsby, Bergquist, Gregerson, Macri, Stokesbary, Chambers, and Corry:

Re: Requesting additional funding in the 2023-25 Operating Budget to support the No Child Left Inside grant program

On behalf of the 115 undersigned organizations, we thank you for your strong support of the No Child Left Inside grant program, which connects youth to nature through outdoor education and recreation programs. Studies have shown the incredible benefits to children who spend time outside. However, far too often, race, income, identity, ability, and zip code affect children's regular and safe access to nature. The No Child Left Inside program helps level that imbalance. Yet, funding requests have always significantly surpassed available grant dollars. The need is great. Therefore, **we respectfully request that the No Child Left Inside grant program be funded at \$9 million in the 2023-25 Operating Budget.**

Revitalized in 2015 by the Governor's Blue Ribbon Task Force on Parks and Outdoor Recreation, No Child Left Inside (NCLI) is now the critical state program connecting youth and families from a variety of underserved communities - including low-income, Black, Indigenous and people of color, immigrants and refugees, and people with disabilities - to the outdoors across the state. Since 2015, the program has served more than 100,000 youth from a wide variety of different locations, economic backgrounds, races, ethnicities and abilities. On average, 70 percent of youth benefitting from the program are eligible for free and reduced lunch, 57 percent are youth of color, 17 percent are English language learners, and 21 percent are youth with disabilities. Each year, NCLI has received more and more grant requests, totaling a historic \$12.4 million in the 2023-25 grant cycle. With no additional funding, only one-third of the applicants will receive financial support. We can do better to meet the needs of children and young adults across the state. No Child Left Inside's strong track record of success deserves more funding.

*The Governor's proposed budget maintains the current funding levels for No Child Left Inside. **We respectfully request that you fund No Child Left Inside at \$9 million, providing an additional \$4.5 million for the program in your proposed operating budget for the next biennium.*** Even at this funding level, the state could not meet all of the demands for support. However, \$9 million would allow the program to serve more than 70 percent (roughly 125 applicants) in the next biennium, providing transformational experiences to more than 100,000 youth across Washington and facilitating more than 3.4 million hours of much-needed outdoor activity. In addition, the state grant dollars would be matched by more than \$6 million in private contributions. To date, NCLI grant funds have been matched by nearly \$4 million in private donations. Most importantly, NCLI is designed to support communities that

need it most. These programs serve rural and urban communities across the state and provide immeasurable benefits that are needed now more than ever.

With your help, we can provide more children the opportunity to connect to nature. The No Child Left Inside grant program can change lives for tens of thousands of Washington's youth. Please make a sound and smart investment for the future of Washington's children by increasing the state's investment in No Child Left Inside. This is a down payment for the future leaders, innovators, and advocates of our communities across the state. Thank you for your leadership and commitment to connecting children to Washington's great outdoors.

Sincerely,

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