



April 6, 2023

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

*Re: Please support the Senate's proposed additional \$5 million one-time investment for the No Child Left Inside grant program in the final 2023-25 Operating Budget*

On behalf of the 54 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, and this year is no exception. The need is great. For the 2023-25 grant cycle, there are 174 applications requesting \$12.3 million in funding. Therefore, **we respectfully request that you fund the No Child Left Inside grant program at the Senate's proposed level, providing an additional one-time investment of \$5 million in your final operating budget.** Funding the program at this level, combined with the \$4.5 million in carry-forward funding for State Parks, would allow the program to fund more than 75 percent of the applications for the 2023-25 grant round.

Simply put, the No Child Left Inside (NCLI) grant program changes lives. It provides youth and families from underserved communities - including low-income, Black, Indigenous and people of color, immigrants and refugees, and people with disabilities - the chance to learn and play outdoors, participate in conservation or stewardship projects, develop leadership skills while building social skills, and even learn about future career pathways. All of these opportunities help to improve academic performance, boost health and well-being, promote personal responsibility and foster a connection with the outdoors, which helps all of our communities across the state. Since 2016, the program has invested \$8.5 million in more than 160 programs across 26 counties, providing transformational outdoor experiences to more than 135,000 youth in urban and rural communities alike. 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 \$12.3 million in the 2023-25 grant cycle. With no additional funding - *as proposed in the House's operating budget* - 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 No Child Left Inside Coalition respectfully requests that you fund the No Child Left Inside grant program at the Senate’s proposed level in PSSB 5187, which would provide a one-time \$5 million investment for the 2023-25 Biennium.** Combined with the State Parks’ carry-forward funding of \$4.5 million, this investment would fund NCLI at \$9.5 million for the 2023-25 Biennium, which would allow the program to fund more than 75 percent of the applications for the 2023-25 grant round, facilitating an estimated 3.5 million hours of outdoor experiences. Importantly, this funding would be matched by more than \$6 million in private contributions.

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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