



January 13, 2025

Dear Washington State Budget Leaders and All Legislators:

RE: Request to maintain \$4.5 million in the 2025-27 Operating Budget to support the No Child Left Inside grant program

On behalf of the **225 undersigned organizations**, we thank you for your strong support of the No Child Left Inside (NCLI) 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 the many benefits of nature. The NCLI grant program helps level that imbalance. Since 2019, NCLI has served 73% of youth who are eligible for free and reduced lunch, 62% youth of color, 24% youth with disabilities and 18% English language learners. Yet, funding requests have historically and significantly surpassed available grant dollars. Just this year, the program received more than \$21 million in grant requests. NCLI is a competitive program established under statute RCW 79A.05.351 designed to fund projects across the state based on their ranking and merit. Given the state's budget challenges, we recognize the need to be thoughtful in our request while continuing to prioritize funding for a program that is essential to Washington youth. **Therefore, we respectfully request that the No Child Left Inside grant program be funded at \$4.5 million in the 2025-27 proposed operating budget. The amount of funding proposed aligns with the outlined 2025-27 Operating Budget request (SB 5167/HB 1198; Sec. 722 at page 379).**

No Child Left Inside is a critical statewide 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. Since 2016, the program has provided \$14.8 million in grants to support 276 programs in 32 counties, matched by nearly \$12 million in private funding. During that time, the program has supported 154,481 underserved youth who were provided with 5.3 million hours of outdoor experiences. Each year, NCLI has seen a growing number of grant requests, with the 2025-27 grant cycle reaching a record \$21.4 million and 261 applications. The No Child Left Inside grant program provides innumerable physical, mental and health benefits to youth across the state. The program is helping meet the growing needs of communities today, while equipping youth for a brighter tomorrow. With sufficient resources, we can continue building on the program's strong track record of success. Understanding potential limitations with the forecasted budget in Washington, ***we respectfully request that you retain the level of funding for No Child Left Inside at \$4.5 million for the program in SB 5167/HB 1198, the 2025-27 Operating Budget bills.***

Maintaining funding for NCLI will ensure that Washington youth continue to benefit from the transformative outdoor experiences the program provides.

With your help, we can provide more children the opportunity to connect with nature and its vast benefits. The No Child Left Inside grant program is already changing lives for tens of thousands of Washington's youth. Please make a sound and smart investment for the future of Washington's youth by maintaining the current investment for this critical program. No Child Left Inside is a down payment on the next generation of leaders who will pave the way for our collective future. Thank you for your leadership and commitment to connecting children to Washington's great outdoors.

Sincerely,

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