

December 16, 2020

Dear President-elect Biden and Vice President-elect Harris,

On behalf of the over 200 undersigned organizations representing millions of Americans, we urge you to include an emergency investment of \$500 million for local parks in any stimulus or economic recovery package your Administration should put forward.

During the coronavirus pandemic, the outdoors have taken on a whole new importance. Parks are where we turn for exercise, fresh air, and finding respite from anxiety and grief. But in too many communities, parks are too few and far between, unwelcoming, rundown, or unsafe. Elsewhere, open space is blocked by locked gates and “No Trespassing” signs.

Just as America’s great outdoors have never been more in demand than they are 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. As it formulates a plan for relief and recovery, your Administration can lead the way.

Investing \$500 million in local parks will have lasting benefits for public health. Scientific research finds that parks, green space, and outdoor activity reduce anxiety, stress, and depression, and improve physical health. During COVID-19, the health benefits of parks are more important than ever, and the effects of park inequities have never been more severe—especially as access to other physical activity opportunities and infrastructure is restricted. Physical activity is one of the most important things a person can do to help curb obesity and weight gain, and lower chances of developing or worsening chronic conditions—all underlying medical conditions that put one at increased risk from COVID-19. Too often our ability to be active is directly linked to our surrounding environment.

This emergency 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 stormwater to keep rivers and lakes cleaner.<sup>1</sup> Green, shady parks also protect people from rising temperatures, and can reduce the deadly “urban heat island effect” by as much as seven degrees.<sup>2</sup>

Additionally, funding local parks will bolster local economies that have been badly weakened by the pandemic. Local parks are responsible for 1.1 million jobs in the U.S., generating over \$166 billion in economic activity.<sup>3</sup> Already this year, 56 percent of parks and recreation agencies have seen their budgets cut<sup>4</sup>. A recent National League of Cities report found that 71% of local governments planned to significantly cut future parks budgets noting regretfully, “cuts to parks and recreation services in particular will negatively impact economic reopening, as many families rely on local summer camps and programs for affordable childcare and youth enrichment during the summer months that likely will not be available.”<sup>5</sup> Parks need to be a priority, not an afterthought, and our local communities need help.

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<sup>1</sup> American Society of Civil Engineers, “Urban Parks Infrastructure gets Congressional Spotlight” <https://www.infrastructurereportcard.org/urban-parks-infrastructure-gets-congressional-spotlight/>, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> United States Environmental Protection Agency, “Learn About Heat Islands” <https://www.epa.gov/heatislands/learn-about-heat-islands>, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> George Mason University Center for Regional Analysis and NRPA, “The Economic Impact of Parks” <https://www.nrpa.org/siteassets/research/economic-impact-study-summary-2020.pdf>, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> National Recreation and Park Association, “Parks Snapshot: May 6-8 Survey Results” <https://www.nrpa.org/blog/nrpa-parks-snapshot-may-6-may-8-survey-results/>, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> National League of Cities, “What COVID-19 Means for City Finance” [https://covid19.nlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/What-Covid-19-Means-For-City-Finances\\_Report-Final.pdf](https://covid19.nlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/What-Covid-19-Means-For-City-Finances_Report-Final.pdf), 2020.

A \$500 million investment in local parks would meaningfully reduce longstanding park inequities that plague our communities. Today, over 100 million people in the U.S., including 28 million children, do not have a quality park or green space within a 10-minute walk of home.<sup>6</sup> A recent analysis by The Trust for Public Land finds parks serving primarily nonwhite populations are half the size of parks that serve majority white populations and serve five times more people per acre.<sup>7</sup>

Communities without adequate parks tend to be the same ones that suffer from unemployment, a lack of affordable housing, under-resourced schools, and a shortage of healthy food access. Inequities in these social determinants of health put Black, Hispanic, and Native American people at increased risk of preventable health conditions, many of which increase the risk of contracting and dying from COVID-19.

An investment in parks for under-resourced communities would be in keeping with the leadership you both have shown for outdoor equity. As a U.S. Senator, Vice-President Elect Harris was the lead sponsor for the Outdoors for All Act and increased investments for the Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership Program (ORLP). That program, funded through the longstanding Land and Water Conservation Fund, prioritizes shovel-ready park development and acquisition projects that expand outdoor recreation in urban communities lacking parks, engages public-private partnerships, creates jobs, and stimulates local economies.

An emergency investment of \$500 million in local parks through an emergency ORLP program could be immediately put to use at 500 targeted, locally prioritized park sites across the country. The Trust for Public Land estimates we can preserve up to 100,000 at-risk seasonal jobs or create at least 8,000 new jobs, all while generating \$1.37 billion in economic activity. By prioritizing projects in communities that have suffered from a history of disinvestment and discriminatory policies, and who have shouldered a disproportionate burden from COVID-19, this funding would represent a big step toward the healthier, more equitable, more resilient future that every American deserves.

We believe access to the outdoors is a right that belongs to all. As you prepare your stimulus or recovery package that will help the economy, create jobs, invest in critical infrastructure, and address historic inequities, we ask that you include emergency funding for local parks.

Sincerely,

National Groups:

Access Fund	Children & Nature Network
America Walks	City Parks Alliance
American Heart Association	Clean Water Action
American Hiking Society	Conservation Lands Foundation
American Planning Association	Great Old Broads for Wilderness
American Society of Landscape Architects	Hispanic Access Foundation
American Trails	KaBOOM!
Appalachian Trail Conservancy	Latino Outdoors
Burton Snowboards	League of Conservation Voters

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<sup>6</sup> The Trust for Public Land, “Parks on the clock: why we believe in the 10 minute-walk” <https://www.tpl.org/blog/why-the-10-minute-walk>, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> The Trust for Public Land, “The Heat is On” <https://www.tpl.org/the-heat-is-on>, 2020.

National League of Cities  
National Recreation and Park Association  
National Wildlife Federation  
Natural Resources Defense Council  
Outdoor Afro  
Outdoor Industry Association  
Outdoor Recreation Roundtable  
PeopleForBikes  
REI Co-op

Seed Your Future  
Sierra Club  
Student Conservation Association  
The Trust for Public Land  
The Venture Out Project  
The Wilderness Society  
Vet Voice Foundation  
Winter Wildlands Alliance

Regional/Local Groups:

A Philip Randolph Square Neighborhood Alliance  
ActiveSGV  
Akron Parks Collaborative  
Angler's Covey  
Asian Pacific Islander Forward Movement  
Austin Outside  
Austin Parks Foundation  
Austin Youth River Watch  
Avid4 Adventure  
Bernalillo Community Health Council  
Big City Mountaineers  
Big Reuse  
Blunn Creek Partnership  
Bronx River Alliance  
Brookfield Civic Association  
Brooklyn Parks and Open Spaces Coalition  
Buffalo Bayou Partnership  
Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy  
California Geographic Alliance  
California Invasive Plant Council  
California Mountain Biking Coalition  
California Outdoor Recreation Partnership  
California Park & Recreation Society  
Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood  
Center for Climate Change and Health  
Central Park Conservancy  
Charles River Watershed Association  
Charleston Parks Conservancy  
Chelsea Waterside Park Association  
Circuit Trail Conservancy  
City of Cripple Creek  
City of Gilroy California Parks & Recreation Commission  
City Parks Foundation  
ClimatePlan  
Community Nature Connection  
Concerned Off-Road Bicyclists Association

Coney Island Beautification Project, Inc.  
Conservation Voters New Mexico  
Court Square Civic Association  
Creating Common Ground  
David Brower Center  
Draper Commons LLC  
Drew Gardens  
East New York 4 Gardens Inc  
Edgemere Coalition Community Garden  
Elmhurst Supporters of Parks  
Emerald Necklace Conservancy  
Environmental Defense Center  
Environmental Volunteers  
Fairmount Park Conservancy  
Fresh Creek Nature Association  
Friends of 4 Parks Alliance  
Friends of Alley Pond Park  
Friends of Art Park Alliance  
Friends of Astoria Heights Park  
Friends of Bushwick Inlet Park  
Friends of Carroll Park  
Friends of Corlears Hook Park  
Friends of Dallas Parks  
Friends of Elton and Linwood Playgrounds  
Friends of Governors Island  
Friends of Inwood Hill Park  
Friends of Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens  
Friends of MacDonald Park  
Friends of Mill Ridge Park  
Friends of Pelham Bay Park  
Friends of St. Andrew's Playground  
Friends of the East River Esplanade  
Friends of the High Line  
Friends of the Los Angeles River  
Friends of the Public Garden  
Friends of Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge  
Friends of Waterfront Seattle

Front Range Climbing Company  
Georgia Outdoor Recreation Coalition  
Georgia Trails Alliance  
Get Outdoors Nevada  
Girl Scouts of Greater New York  
Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy  
Great Rivers Greenway  
Great Springs Project  
Green Map System  
Groundwork Richmond  
GrowNYC  
HerpDigest  
Hike for Life  
Historic House Trust of New York City  
Hong Kong Dragon Boat Festival  
Hoosier Environmental Council  
Houston Parks Board  
Hunters Point Parks Conservancy  
Hutchinson River Restoration Project  
Inclusion Outdoors  
Jacob H. Schiff Playground Neighborhood Association  
Kelly Street Garden  
Klamath County  
Le'alani S. Boykin Consulting  
Lewis H. Latimer House  
Lily Auchincloss Foundation, Inc.  
Los Angeles Neighborhood Land Trust  
Los Angeles Parks Foundation  
Los Padres Forest Watch  
Louisville Parks Foundation  
Loving The Bronx  
Lowelives Respectable Citizens' Club  
Lower East Side Ecology Center  
Marcus Garvey Park Alliance  
Memphis River Parks Partnership  
Mile High Youth Corps  
Millennium Prevention, Inc.  
Milton Garden Club  
Minneapolis Parks Foundation  
Mountain Bikers of Santa Cruz  
National Association for Olmsted Parks  
NatureLegacies  
New York Building Congress  
New York League of Conservation Voters  
New York Restoration Project (NYRP)  
New Yorkers for Parks  
Newport Bay Conservancy  
Newtown Creek Alliance  
NYC Audubon  
Oakland Parks and Recreation Foundation

Old Stone House & Washington Park  
Olympia Parks, Arts, and Recreation  
Outdoor Advocacy Project  
Outdoor Outreach  
Parent Child Relationship Association  
Park Pride  
Pease Park Conservancy  
Pennsylvania Recreation and Park Society  
Phoenix Zones Initiative  
Pike Peaks Climbers Alliance  
Pikes Peak Outdoor Recreation Alliance  
Pistil Designs  
Pogo Park  
Portland Parks Conservancy  
Randall's Island Park Alliance  
Red Hook Conservancy  
River Heritage Conservancy, Inc.  
Rockaway Initiative for Sustainability and Equity (RISE)  
Rocktown Adventures  
Rocky Mountain Field Institute (RMFI)  
Rose Kennedy Greenway Conservancy  
San Diego Mountain Biking Association  
San Jose Parks Foundation  
Southern Off-Road Bicycle Association  
St. Andrew's Playground  
Tahoe Mountain Sports  
Tehachapi Valley Recreation & Park District  
The Bronx is Blooming  
The New York Turtle & Tortoise Society  
The Trail Foundation  
Time Square Alliance  
Trails and Open Space Coalition  
Trinity Park Conservancy  
Upper Green Side  
Van Cortlandt Park Alliance  
Victor Main Street (VMS) Program  
Volunteers for Springfield Park, Inc  
Washington Recreation and Parks Association  
Washington Trails Association  
Waterfront Alliance  
West 80s Neighborhood Association  
WildCare of Western New York  
WOLF School  
Youth Transportation Organization (Yoots)