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. Green, shady parks also protect people from rising temperatures, and can reduce the deadly “urban heat island effect” by as much as seven degrees.

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. Already this year, 56 percent of parks and recreation agencies have seen their budgets cut. 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.” Parks need to be a priority, not an afterthought, and our local communities need help.

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.\(^6\) 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.\(^7\)

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


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
Blunalillo 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 Glilroy 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 Corlelars 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
Lowelifes 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)