



CONSERVATION
MINNESOTA

February 18, 2021

To: Representative Becker-Finn, Chair Hansen and Members of the House Environment & Natural Resources Finance Committee,

Thank you for bringing HF 76 (Becker-Finn) to the committee today. Conservation Minnesota supports the continuation of the No Child Left Inside Program made possible by the provisions proposed in HF 76.

The No Child Left Inside Program has been one of the most popular and successful grant programs implemented by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources - and let me remind you the program is only 2 years old! The strong success of the grant program can be attributed to Minnesotans' recognition that more resources are necessary to educate and engage all Minnesotans, especially children, in the many ways to enjoy our lakes, rivers and beautiful outdoors. We are especially aware of the benefits of enjoying the outdoors during this global pandemic, and it's important that the next generation of hikers, anglers, paddlers and outdoor enthusiasts have the skills necessary to enjoy Minnesota's natural resources.

One of the best ways to understand the success of the program is to take a look at where the grant money is being appropriated. In phase 2 of the No Child Left Inside grant program, 34 organizations from across the state received funding awards between \$5,000 and \$49,000. To name just a few of the grant recipients, I would highlight the Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center is establishing a 4-seasons Mountain Bike Program, the Lower Sioux Indian Community is implementing their year-round Dakota Youth Outdoors Program, the Hmong College Prep Academy funded their Bass Fishing Club, and Kerkhoven-Murdock-Sunburg Public Schools helped their students with trap shooting training,

These schools, clubs, and other groups have shown a keen ability to demonstrate the need for the continuation of the No Child Left Inside Grant Program, and I hope that you will consider supporting HF 76 today so that additional organizations and projects have the same opportunity to access resources in the future.

Thank you for your support of HF 76.

Sincerely,

Nels Paulsen
Policy Director



NCEL

National Caucus of
Environmental Legislators

Testimony of the National Caucus of Environmental Legislators Regarding Outdoor Engagement Legislation Across the Country

Created by and for state legislators, the National Caucus of Environmental Legislators is a nonprofit that connects over 1,000 environmentally-committed state legislators from all 50 states and both parties. NCEL provides venues and opportunities for lawmakers to share ideas and collaborate on environmental issues. NCEL does not lobby or take formal positions on legislation. We submit this testimony to provide a context of similar legislative actions across the country.

To Members of the House Environment & Natural Resources Committee:

Minnesota is part of a growing number of states introducing legislation to increase outdoor engagement in recent years. These efforts have included establishing Offices of Outdoor Recreation, creating grants to support outdoor engagement for underserved populations, developing new environmental education programs, and promoting outdoor equity. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have underscored the value of local outdoor engagement and continued the emphasis into the current legislative session.

In 2021, there are more than [40 bills introduced](#) across the country related to outdoor engagement. Notable examples with similarities to Minnesota include: Hawaii [SB507](#) to establish a No Child Left Inside grant program; Illinois [HB0194](#) to create an Outside Rx Program; Oregon [SB407](#) to establish an outdoor therapy grant program; and Washington [SB5056](#) to establish a wilderness therapy program.

One relevant existing program is New Mexico's Outdoor Equity Fund, which was established as part of the Outdoor Recreation Division in 2019 ([SB462](#)). The Equity Fund supports outdoor engagement opportunities for low-income youth through grants for equipment staff time, transportation, and more. The fund is supported through both state appropriations and outside contributions. The Equity Fund distributed \$261,863 to 25 organizations in the first year, with a portion of that money coming from in-state and national organizations and foundations. Another example is the [Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund](#), which created a matching system for individual contributions and state funding.

Currently Washington and Nevada have similar No Child Left Inside programs established by the state legislature. [Washington's program](#) has existed since 2007 and received a \$1.5 million appropriation in 2019. From 2015-2019, the program funded 58 projects which served a total of 30,196 children. This equates to 753,020 hours of education and funded 134 staff positions.

With state legislatures increasingly focusing on health and equitable access to nature due to the pandemic, NCEL expects to see continued growth of state and local programs that provide outdoor engagement throughout the country.