

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

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The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen  
Chair  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,  
Science & Related Agencies  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jerry Moran  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,  
Science & Related Agencies  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chair Shaheen and Ranking Member Moran,

We write to urge the Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science & Related Agencies to fund three environment-related education grant programs under the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA's) Education Program at the level of \$30 million in the Fiscal Year 2026 appropriations bill.

1. \$12 million in appropriations for the Bay-Watershed Education and Training (B-WET) program, an increase of \$3.3 million over FY24 levels, would enable NOAA to return to full strength in all seven of the regional B-WET program areas—California, Chesapeake Bay, Great Lakes, Gulf of Mexico, Hawai'i, New England, and Pacific Northwest—which currently support a total of 24 states and the District of Columbia
2. \$8 million in appropriations for the Environmental Literacy Program (ELP), an increase of \$2 million over FY24 levels, would return these competitive education grants to a robust level of grant-making and national impact.
3. \$10 million in additional new appropriations for the NOAA Education Program, for the purpose of using existing statutory authority to support state Departments of Education in implementing community resilience curricula in grades K-12.

NOAA is mandated to support and coordinate educational activities to enhance public awareness and understanding of ocean-related issues through 33 U.S. Code §893a. Robust funding for these key programs would help meet this statutory intent.

Established in 2002 and continuously funded since, B-WET supports locally relevant, experiential learning with the purpose of increasing understanding of how the quality of a watershed affects the lives of the people who live in it. Through Fiscal Year 2024, B-WET funded 124 institutions in 24 states and the District of Columbia.<sup>1</sup> Approximately 7,000 educators received professional development to enhance their skills and confidence in using STEM and environmental education, and an estimated 68,400 students participated in multi-

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<sup>1</sup> *Bay Watershed Education and Training (B-WET): Impacts*, U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (Jan. 18, 2024), <https://www.noaa.gov/office-education/bwet/impacts>. Last accessed Apr. 17, 2024.

stage, inquiry-based activities that include learning both in the classroom and outdoors.<sup>2</sup> The vast majority of B-WET funding is redistributed locally for student activities and has direct economic impacts in the community it serves.

While B-WET addresses specific regional education needs, the ELP was established in 2005 under President George W. Bush to advance STEM education through support for national-scale projects.<sup>3</sup> The ELP is the most comprehensive national grants program focused on environmental literacy. It is designed to improve and expand the learning, understanding, and application of earth systems science and advance science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education. This federal grant program leverages high quality partners and incorporates NOAA's scientific assets in formal and informal learning environments. ELP's current focus is on projects that build environmental literacy of K-12 students and the public, so they are knowledgeable of the ways in which their community can become more resilient to extreme weather, climate change, and/or other environmental hazards, and become involved in achieving that resilience.

In 2024, ELP provided more than 900 formal and informal educators with professional development using evidence-based practices and conveying Earth system science in compelling and relevant ways.<sup>4</sup> More than 3,000 K-12 students participated in formal science education programs, and more than 35,000 children, youth, and adults participated in ELP-supported informal science education programs.<sup>5</sup> NOAA's ELP program is very competitive: less than 12 percent of the reviewed applications in 2022 ultimately received funding.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, we request appropriations for community resilience education grants. Using NOAA's broad education authority under 33 U.S. Code §893a, and building on NOAA's thoughtful community resilience education theory of change that underlies its current ELP grant-making for community members, these grants would support the seven state-level Departments of Education that have already begun investing in efforts to ensure their residents become educated about resiliency in their communities. This investment would leverage NOAA's strong education partnerships and extensive collection of extreme weather observations, research and services. The grants program would build on the excellent work of NOAA's Environmental Literacy Grants, and would enable NOAA to more fully implement its educational programs as established in the *America COMPETES Act* (Pub. L. 110-69).

As our nation begins to grapple with the complexities and challenges of diminishing ocean, coastal and watershed resources as well as severe weather-related events, these programs are timely and highly relevant. We thank you for your consideration of this request to provide \$30

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> *U.S. Ocean Action Plan: The Bush Administration's Response to the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy*, Executive Office of President George W. Bush (Dec. 17, 2004), [https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/data/oceans/coris/library/NOAA/other/us\\_ocean\\_action\\_plan\\_2004.pdf](https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/data/oceans/coris/library/NOAA/other/us_ocean_action_plan_2004.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> *Environmental Literacy Program: Impacts*, U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (Mar. 20, 2024), <https://www.noaa.gov/office-education/elp/impacts>. Last accessed Mar. 21, 2024.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

Chair Shaheen and Ranking Member Moran

May 7, 2024

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million in appropriations for these three important NOAA environment-related education grant programs.

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