Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 16, 2025

The Honorable Hal Rogers
Chair
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Grace Meng
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Rogers and Ranking Member Meng,

We write to urge the Subcommittee to fund three climate-related education grant programs under the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA's) Education Program in the total amount of $30 million in the Fiscal Year 2026 appropriations bill.

1. Funding the Bay-Watershed Education and Training (B-WET) at $12 million would enable NOAA to return to full strength in all seven of the regional B-WET programs (California, Chesapeake Bay, Great Lakes, Gulf of Mexico, Hawai'i, New England, and Pacific Northwest) which currently impact a total of 24 states and the District of Columbia.

2. Funding the competitive education grants (also called Environmental Literacy Program or ELP) program at $8 million would return it to a robust level of grant-making and national impact.

3. Funding an expansion of ELP at $10 million to support state Departments of Education in their efforts in partnership with state-based environmental education organizations to ensure their students understand resiliency, changes in climate, and hazardous weather will enable perhaps 15 states to make major advances in building community resilience education into their educational support for local schools and districts.

NOAA is mandated to support and coordinate educational activities to enhance public awareness and understanding of ocean-related issues. NOAA education activities are authorized under the American Innovation and Competitiveness Act (2017), which obligates NOAA to carry out science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) activities to improve interest and literacy in STEM subjects. The American Innovation and Competitiveness Act committee report specifically cites B-WET as a "model" program noted for "its rigorous program-wide assessment of performance and impact among students and teachers."

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. B-WET supports programs for students as

well as professional development for teachers, while advancing regional education and conservation priorities. In 2024, B-WET funded 124 institutions in 24 states.

Approximately 7,000 educators received professional development to enhance their skills and confidence in using environmental education and Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences (MWEEs) to address multiple subjects' curriculum standards and local education agency initiatives. Over 68,400 students participated in multi-stage, inquiry-based activities that include learning both in the classroom and outdoors in a local context. The vast majority of B-WET funding is redistributed locally for student activities and has direct economic impacts in the community it serves. The National Research Council highlighted B-WET in their 2010 report on NOAA Education as "the most rigorous evaluation design employed among the NOAA evaluation programs."

While B-WET addresses specific regional education needs, the Environmental Literacy Program was established in 2005 under President George W. Bush to advance STEM education through support for national-scale projects. ELP is the longest standing and 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 funded 52 institutions to help people become more aware of how to increase their resilience to hazardous weather, changes in climate, and other environmental threats assessed by NOAA. Over 900 formal and informal educators participated in ongoing professional learning communities designed to empower each educator with the confidence and competence to teach NOAA-related topics as well as use NOAA's assets to educate others. Over 3,000 K-12 students participated in formal education projects, and over 35,000 children, youth, and adults participated in informal education projects. NOAA's ELP program is very competitive: less than 7% of the reviewed applications in 2024 ultimately received funding.

Finally, we urge support for expansion of the ELP with funds to support state Departments of Education in their efforts to ensure their students understand resiliency, changes in climate, and hazardous weather. This investment would leverage NOAA's strong education partnerships and extensive collection of climate observations, research and services by bringing these to the formal education system. The additional funding would build on the excellent work of NOAA's Environmental Literacy Program and would enable NOAA to more fully implement the American Innovation and Competitiveness Act.

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.

Sincerely,

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