

March 10, 2016

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science & Related Agencies
142 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Ranking Member
Subcommittee of Commerce, Justice,
Science & Related Agencies
125 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Shelby and Ranking Member Mikulski;

We write to urge you to fund the Bay-Watershed Education and Training (B-WET) and competitive education grants (also called Environmental Literacy Grants or ELG) programs operated by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA's) Education Program in the total amount of \$20 million in the Fiscal Year 2017 appropriations bill. Funding B-WET at \$12 million would enable NOAA to return to operating all seven of the regional B-WET programs (California, Chesapeake Bay, Great Lakes, the Gulf of Mexico, Hawai'i, New England, and the Pacific Northwest) which impact a total of 27 states and the District of Columbia. Funding the ELG program at \$8 million would return it to a robust level of grant-making and national impact.

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 America COMPETES Act, which obligates NOAA to carry out science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) activities to improve interest and literacy in STEM subjects. The America COMPETES Act committee report specifically cites the Bay-Watershed Education and Training program and the Environmental Literacy Grants program as NOAA's principal education grant programs. It describes 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 then, 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 2015, the B-WET program reached an estimated 66,000 students and 2,000 teachers, while supporting 84 institutions. The vast majority of B-WET funding is redistributed locally for student activities and has direct economic impacts in the community it serves. Since 2002, NOAA has awarded \$69 million to support 650 local projects.

While B-WET addresses specific regional education needs, the Environmental Literacy Grants were established in 2005 to advance STEM education through support for national-scale projects. ELG 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 grants program leverages high quality partners and incorporates NOAA's scientific assets in formal and informal learning environments.

The ELG program annually provides more than 60 million people with compelling, up-to-date information on the ocean, coasts, Great Lakes, and weather through formal and informal science education programs as well as exhibits. NOAA's ELG program is very competitive: only 10% of peer reviewed applications ultimately receive funding.

In 2015, ELG supported 100 science education institutions in offering up-to-date information on the ocean, coasts, Great Lakes, and weather to over 60 million people through formal and informal education programs as well as exhibits such as NOAA's Science On a Sphere. ELG funds provided over 2,000 formal and informal educators with professional development using evidence based practices and conveying Earth system science in compelling and relevant ways. And approximately 200,000 youth and adult learners engaged in ELG-supported, high quality learning experiences designed to increase their understanding and ability to apply concepts focused on improving environmental literacy.

These two programs have enabled NOAA, as the nation's leading expert on weather, coastal and ocean information, to partner with the nation's top non-profit organizations and educators to bring this information and hands-on experiences to students. The programs have demonstrated their effectiveness and value to stakeholder communities. And 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, they are timely and highly relevant.

Unfortunately, funding in the past years has fallen fundamentally short of the level necessary for NOAA to carry out its education mandate. Therefore, we respectfully request an increase to \$20 million (the level of funding in FY 2009 and FY2010) for these two NOAA education programs so that NOAA can continue to carry out and improve its successful STEM activities. Should you have any questions about this letter, please have your staff contact Jim Elder of the Campaign for Environmental Literacy at (978) 526-7768 or Elder@FundEE.org.

Sincerely,

National Organizations

Afterschool Alliance
Association of Nature Center Administrators
Association of Science-Technology Centers
Campaign for Environmental Literacy
Captain Planet Foundation
Conservation Legacy
Council of Environmental Deans and Directors
Council for Environmental Education/Project WILD
Earthforce
Ecological Society of America
Green Business Certification, Inc.
Green Schools National Network
Green Schools Alliance
Institute for Applied Ecology
National Center for Science Education
National Council for Science and the Environment
National Project for Excellence in Environmental Education
National Recreation and Park Association
National Science Teachers Association

National Wildlife Federation
North American Association for Environmental Education
Openlands
Project WET Foundation
Pinchot Institute for Conservation
Second Nature
Sierra Club
Society for Conservation Biology
The Ocean Foundation
The Ocean Project
The Teaching & Learning Collaborative
U.S. Green Building Council

Regional Organizations:

Alliance for the Great Lakes
Canyonlands Field Institute
Great Lakes Fisheries Trust
Lake Superior Zoological Society

State Organizations:

Blandford Nature Center, MI
Conservation Council for Hawai'i, HI
District of Columbia Environmental Education Consortium, DC
East Bay Regional Park District, CA
Environmental Education Council of Ohio, OH
Environmental Education Association of Oregon, OR
Hilton Pond Center for Piedmont Natural History, SC
Kentucky Association for Environmental Education, KY
Minnesota Association for Environmental Educators, MN
Seacoast Science Center, NH