

March 23, 2020

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chairman
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies
131 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Tom Udall
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies
125 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Murkowski and Ranking Member Udall:

When Americans go to the beach, they deserve to know that the water is safe. In order to provide this assurance, we write to urge you to provide at least \$10 million in funding for the Beaches Environmental Assessment and Coastal Health (BEACH) Act grant program in Fiscal Year (FY) 2021. This level of funding adequately reflects the program's importance to our nation's coastal water quality efforts, as well as returns to more robust funding levels we saw before FY20's allocation of \$9.238 million. Since the BEACH Act became law in 2000, water quality testing grants have benefitted coastal communities from New Jersey to Oregon, Maine to Florida, and the Great Lakes to the Gulf Coast.

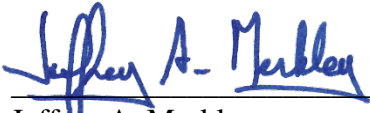
America's beaches and lakeshores are some of our country's greatest natural resources, hosting over 100 million visitors each year. Families across the country look forward to beach vacations and expect that it is safe to go in the water. BEACH Act grants allow States to protect the safety of these visitors by conducting water quality tests, posting warning signs, or even closing beaches when bacteria levels indicate the water is too contaminated.

Swimming in polluted water exposes people to pathogens that can cause gastrointestinal illness, skin rashes, and ear, eye, and staph infections, and recreating in polluted water bears public health costs of \$2.9 billion nationwide. The elimination of the BEACH Act grant program would further increase public health costs as less water quality information would be available to warn beach goers of polluted conditions. It would also put at risk the nation's \$124 billion coastal tourism and recreation sectors, which are driven by public confidence in healthy beaches, and support 2.4 million jobs nationwide.

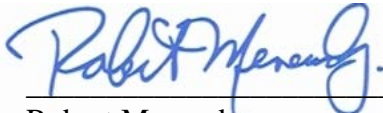
BEACH Act grants have supported the monitoring of thousands of beaches in a cost-effective way that keeps our constituents and communities safe. At the same time, inflation and budget cuts have forced states to make do with less, resulting in most states covering less beaches and shortening their monitoring season. Given the high economic value of clean coastal waters and the importance of protecting the health of those who recreate at the beach, a \$10 million appropriation is a sound investment in our nation's economy and in our public health.

We all share the goal of protecting the health of swimmers and other recreational water users. Without adequate funding, many States will eliminate or significantly curtail their beach water quality monitoring programs. With over 20,000 beach closures and advisories issued every year, funding for beach monitoring is as critical as ever.


Sincerely,




Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Robert Menendez
United States Senator




Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator



Brian Schatz
United States Senator

/s/ Angus S. King Jr.

Angus S. King Jr.
United States Senator



Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator

/s/ Richard Blumenthal

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

/s/ Thomas R. Carper

Thomas R. Carper
United States Senator

/s/ Mazie K. Hirono

Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator

/s/ Jeanne Shaheen

Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator

/s/ Cory A. Booker

Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

/s/ Jack Reed

Jack Reed
United States Senator

/s/ Sheldon Whitehouse

Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator

/s/ Gary C. Peters

Gary C. Peters
United States Senator

/s/ Kirsten Gillibrand

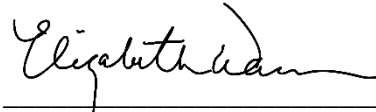
Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Van Hollen

Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

/s/ Sherrod Brown

Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

/s/ Maria Cantwell

Maria Cantwell
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

/s/ Richard J. Durbin

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

/s/ Ron Wyden

Ron Wyden
United States Senator

/s/ Debbie Stabenow

Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator



Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator