

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 12, 2025

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and
Related Agencies
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and
Related Agencies
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairwoman Murkowski and Ranking Member Merkley:

We write to respectfully request that you provide at least \$15 million for Beaches Environmental Assessment and Coastal Health (BEACH) Act grants in the Fiscal Year 2026 (FY26) Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill.

Hundreds of millions of Americans and visitors enjoy U.S. beaches every year, driving coastal tourism and recreation industries valued at \$240 billion and supporting 2.5 million jobs nationwide. Public confidence in the safety of our beaches is of the utmost importance in ensuring that this economic and recreational success continues. Yet, in 2023, U.S. beach safety was brought into question. The Environmental Protection Agency's national "Safe for Swimming" Report found that roughly 55% of U.S. beaches had unsafe levels of water contamination for at least one day in 2022.

Beach water quality monitoring programs funded by the Environmental Protection Agency's BEACH Act grants program are the best tool we have to instill confidence in the public that our coasts are safe for swimming, surfing, fishing, and other recreational activities. With federal support, states, territories and tribes along the ocean and Great Lakes are running beach monitoring and notification programs that detect pathogens that make people sick. When tests show unsafe levels of bacteria, local and state agencies notify the public or close the beaches completely until bacteria levels fall to acceptable levels. Without this critical federal support, beachgoers would be in serious jeopardy, with many states and localities unable to fill the resulting funding gap to keep communities and their valuable tourism economies safe.

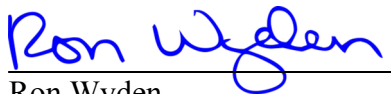
Although the program is authorized at \$30 million, annual funding has hovered right around \$10 million for the last two decades. In the FY24 budget and FY25 Continuing Resolution, Congress appropriated only \$9.75 million to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for the *beach protection categorical grants*, down from \$10.619 million in FY23. Chronic underfunding has forced coastal states, territories, and tribes to stretch their federal grant dollars to have the greatest impact to protect public safety, but this has resulted in difficult tradeoffs on how best to do this.

For example, most states only monitor beaches during the busy summer season, often only from Memorial Day through Labor Day, but this leaves beachgoers at risk of exposure to pathogens during the increasingly warm spring and fall months. Surfers and fishermen who often frequent our beaches in winter are left wholly unprotected. Even in states with year-round swimming

seasons, such as Florida and Hawaii, officials may be forced to prioritize testing at popular beaches in more urban areas, leaving many beaches throughout these states to be tested as infrequently as once a quarter or not at all. Additionally, according to the EPA Office of the Inspector General, increases in inflation have caused the modest funding to the program to have lost nearly 1/3 of its value since 2000, causing more gaps in testing at the state and local level each year.

A modest increase of \$5 million in funding would alleviate pressure on state beach programs making difficult decisions over which beaches to test or to limit sampling seasons as the cost of running these programs continue to rise. We believe this small investment will have an outsized impact on American beachgoers and foreign tourists, the communities that welcome them, and the businesses that count on their support. To that end, we urge you to increase this vital investment by dedicating at least \$15 million for BEACH Act grants in the FY26 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill.

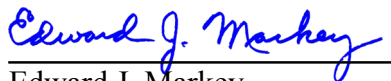
Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



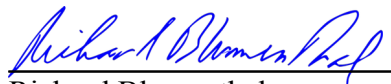
Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Elissa Slotkin
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Tina Smith
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



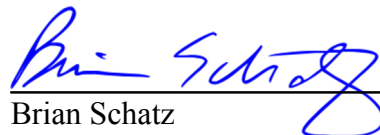
Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Brian Schatz
United States Senator



Gary C. Peters
United States Senator



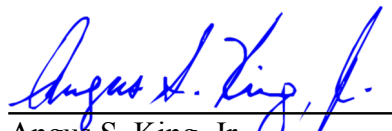
Jack Reed
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Andy Kim
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Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator