August 21, 2018

The Honorable Cory Gardner
U.S. Senator - CO
354 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Request to Co-Sponsor Legislation to Improve Local Parks and Green Spaces

Dear Senator Gardner:

We are a broad-based coalition of local elected officials, parks practitioners, city planners, conservationists, outdoor businesses, active transportation and public health advocates who believe in the power of parks and green spaces to bring people together, improve health and transform communities. Local parks generate more than $154 billion in economic activity, support 1.1 million jobs and provide multiple benefits when designed for the built environment, including physical activity and economic and infrastructure savings.

Due to the multiple benefits that parks supply to our communities, we ask you to become an original co-sponsor of legislation that would help ensure that all Americans have access to close-to-home parks and outdoor recreation opportunities. The bill would codify the Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership (ORLP), a Land and Water Conservation Fund program that is administered by the National Parks Service. The ORLP enables states and local governments to create new and improve existing parks in underserved communities and unleash the health, economic, and green infrastructure benefits of parks and green spaces – without the use of taxpayer dollars. The bill would serve as a companion to the bipartisan H.R. 2943, sponsored by Representatives Nanette D. Barragan (CA-44) and Michael Turner (OH-10).

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, almost one-third of children are overweight or obese and more than one in three adults in the United States struggle with obesity, which puts a person at greater risk for other chronic illnesses. Even though research shows that nature and green spaces are associated with higher levels of physical activity, nearly one in three Americans, including 28 million children, do not have access to a quality park within a 10-minute walk of their home. At a time when inadequate physical activity accounts for $117 billion in annual health care costs, more and better parks, playgrounds, trails and greenways should be built in the places that need them the most.

The economic benefits of parks are worth their investment as they have shown to increase property values by 5-20 percent and therefore increase local government revenues –a win for homeowners and taxpayers. Taxpayers also come out on top when local governments choose to become more resilient by managing stormwater with natural infrastructure alongside traditional gray infrastructure. For example, the City of Atlanta is saving at least $17 million in infrastructure costs by building a park that can handle a 500-year flood instead of building a
massive and costlier underground storage tank. In Omaha, Nebraska, the Elmwood Park project was combined with a neighborhood sewer separation project to help reduce combined sewer overflows. The system is designed to handle flows from a 100-year storm and city officials estimate savings of $550,000 over a traditional gray infrastructure solution to combined sewer overflows.

We appreciate your consideration to cosponsor this important legislation that will help cities and towns across the country create more green space in their communities. **To become an original co-sponsor, please contact Ike Irby at Isaac_Irby@harris.senate.gov.**

Sincerely,

American Heart Association
America Walks
American Forests
American Planning Association
American Society of Landscape Architects
City Parks Alliance
GreenLatinos
Hispanic Access Foundation
League of Conservation Voters
National League of Cities
Natural Resources Defense Council
National Recreation and Parks Association
Outdoor Alliance for Kids
Outdoor Industry Association
Trust for America’s Health
The Nature Conservancy
The Trust for Public Land
Vet Voice Foundation