

# Transit to Trails Act

## **Summary:**

The Transit to Trails Act aims to reduce barriers between people and access to nature. The bill would establish a grant program under the Department of Transportation to provide critically underserved communities with direct access to our nation's public lands.

## **Background:**

Parks and playgrounds are important assets in promoting an active living and overall health across broad segments of the population, yet not all communities have adequate access to such resources. Research shows that having parks nearby increases the likelihood of being physically active; and parks that include certain active recreation features such as trails, playgrounds and sport facilities may stimulate higher levels of park-based physical activity. But for millions of Americans, recreation spaces are a few and far between and usually require a drive. For communities with higher poverty rates, having parks and green spaces nearby is significantly less likely. Therefore, it is critical that policy makers and advocates ensure that underserved communities have adequate access to parks and recreation resources.

## **Issue:**

Critically underserved communities disproportionately lack access to green space, and transportation remains a significant barrier for many families to reach existing natural resources. In urban, rural, and remote areas, accessing parks and open spaces is still a challenge. According to the Wilderness Society, "people in urban communities face the greatest barrier to visit our nation's public lands and transportation remains a significant obstacle". This lack of access means that many Americans are being discouraged from enjoying our public lands!

The Transit to Trails Act attempts to fix this problem by prioritizing communities of high need and funding transportation services to our natural resources. This legislation would ensure that our public lands are more accessible to low-income communities and would ensure that all Americans regardless of income or zip code can enjoy our public lands.

**Facts:**

- Low-income communities and communities of color disproportionately lack access to park and public lands. (The City Project)
- Unequal distribution to park resources affects low-income neighborhoods and communities of color, which have far fewer parks and recreational facilities than more affluent, non-Hispanic, White communities. (UC Berkeley, School of Public Health)
- Latinos and African-Americans disproportionately live in areas that offer fewer park acres per person. Asian-Americans are more likely to be in those areas as well, though to a lesser degree. (UC Berkeley, School of Public Health)
- Celebrating diverse culture, history, and art through education can provide personal connections that attract people to parks, waters, and monuments, and healthy physical activity can keep them coming back. (National Park Service, Healthy Parks, Healthy People US)

**Why the Transit to Trails Act?**

- Everyone regardless of their wealth and income, zip code, racial and ethnic background, or physical abilities should have opportunities to connect with the nation's and cultural resources.
- To provide youth and their families more opportunities to learn about water, land, wildlife, cultural history, and engage in physical activity through recreational opportunities.
- Public parks, waters, and monuments are intended to serve all residents but not all neighborhoods and people have equal access to these public resources.
- Reduce barriers between people and nature by addressing the critical lack of parks and open space for millions of people.
- Access to parks means healthy people – park access contributes to people's physical, mental, and spiritual health, and social well-being, and combats obesity, asthma, and other illnesses related to inactivity.
- Help reduce traffic congestion and parking problems - improve air quality and reducing run-off of polluted water into river and the ocean by providing a more accessible, public transportation.
- Help address inequality and unfair disparities in access to public parks and green spaces while creating and maintaining new green spaces for the future.

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