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*Testimony before the Senate Committee on Sporting Heritage, Small Business and Rural Issues
Senator André Jacque
February 10, 2022*

Chair Stafsholt and Committee Members,

Thank you for holding this hearing on Senate Bill 376, which would expand the Every Kid Outdoors program to Wisconsin's state parks.

Every Kid Outdoors is a federal public lands youth initiative started by the U.S. Department of the Interior in 2015 to expand access for all 4th graders and their families to be able to experience the places that are home to our country's natural treasures and rich history. The program gives 4th graders and their families 1 year of free access to national parks. Since the program was created, several states have begun to accept these passes at their state parks as a way to introduce new people to their state park system. Senate Bill 376 will establish the same opportunity in Wisconsin to further encourage interest in the lifelong fun, exercise and adventures possible in our state parks.

Most 4th graders are already registered by their teachers for the national program, and for those who are not, sign up is quick and easy through the program's website. Should Wisconsin choose to accept these passes at state parks, there would be no separate applications to handle.

This proposed policy change was emphatically endorsed during the DNR and Wisconsin Conservation Congress spring hearing earlier this year by a vote of 8,727 to 775, or roughly 92% in support, garnering significantly more votes in favor than any other question put before all state residents. I am pleased that this legislation has strong bi-partisan co-sponsorship and is formally supported by the Sierra Club of Wisconsin.

Thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 376.



RACHAEL A. CABRAL-GUEVARA

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 55TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

*Testimony before the Senate Committee on Sporting Heritage, Small Business and Rural Issues
Representative Rachael Cabral-Guevara
February 10th, 2022*

Chairman Stafsholt and members of the committee. Thank you for allowing me to testify today on Senate bill 376.

Visiting national parks is an exciting endeavor, especially for kids.

Every Kid Outdoors was created so fourth graders and their families could discover wildlife, resources, and history for free. With this program, fourth graders and family members gain access to over 2,000 federal lands and waters. While Every Kid Outdoors provides fourth graders free access to national parks, this bill would open up the opportunity for those same students to visit Wisconsin's state parks in the same way they are able to visit national parks. With no cost to students or parents, this bill creates a unique opportunity for each individual fourth grader in Wisconsin to develop crucial connections to public lands that will inspire a new generation of conservationists.

In SB 376, fourth grade students in Wisconsin will be able to have 1 full year of free access to Wisconsin's state parks which begins each year on September 1 and goes through August 31. To obtain a pass, it's as easy as going to the Every Kid Outdoors website, completing a few short educational activities, and then printing out a paper voucher to bring with for every public visit. This change will allow Wisconsin to take a step forward by providing this unique opportunity to our kids.

Thank you again for your time. I am hopeful you are able to support this bi-partisan piece of legislation.



Senate Committee on Sporting Heritage, Small Business and Rural Issues

2021 Senate Bill 376

Fee waivers for state park vehicle admission receipts to pupils with Every Kid Outdoors passes February 10, 2021

Good morning Chair Stafsholt and members of the Committee. My name is Steve Schmelzer, and I am the Bureau Director overseeing the Wisconsin State Park System for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Thank you for the opportunity to testify, for informational purposes, on Senate Bill 376 (SB 376), related to fee waivers for state park vehicle admission receipts to pupils with Every Kid Outdoors passes.

The Every Kid Outdoors program administered by the National Park Service is designed to help increase access to the outdoors. Last year, the Wisconsin state park system saw over 21 million visitors across more than 100 properties. By allowing visitors free admission, this bill could inspire many to purchase either an annual pass or future daily passes to continue to visit these properties.

Under SB 376, the department would waive admission fees needed to enter a State Park for pupils with a valid Every Kid Outdoors pass issued by the National Park Service. Other fees such as overnight camping fees and shelter reservation fees would still apply. Surrounding states such as Minnesota and Michigan do not currently accept Every Kid Outdoors passes, but some states do accept this pass. The bill would have minimal effects on administrative procedures and management. DNR Parks and Forest staff would manage this similarly to Federal Ice Age Reserve properties where the National Park Pass is accepted. Participants show their National Park pass and receive a free daily pass for entrance to those properties. Free admission typically results in higher visitation at many of the properties.

The department supports efforts to increase public access to the many outdoor recreation activities available in our state. It is important to keep the self-funded model of our State Park System in mind to ensure our continued ability to provide the best outdoor recreation experience for our visitors.

On behalf of the Department of Natural Resources, we would like to thank you for your time today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.