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Senator, 29th District

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CHAIR, Senate Democratic Conference

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Aging
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Veterans, Homeland Security and Military Affairs

March 18, 2015

Governor Andrew Cuomo
New York State
Capitol Building
Albany, New York 12224

Honorable Dean G. Skelos
Temporary President, New York State Senate
Legislative Office Building, Room 909
Albany, NY 12247

Honorable Carl Heastie
Speaker, New York State Assembly
Legislative Office Building, Room 932
Albany, NY 12247

Dear Governor Cuomo and Legislative Leaders,

We are writing today regarding the very important issue of our state parks and historic sites. The FY 2015-2016 Executive Budget proposal includes \$110 million worth of New York Works Capital Funding for the Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation (OPRHP). In addition, the Governor has proposed \$500,000 in the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) for a new capacity-building grant program to strengthen State Parks friends' groups, which provide critical services and care to our parks. Together, these funding streams will play an important role in beautifying our park system and generating jobs for their surrounding communities. As such, we respectfully request that the final budget agreement includes these funds.

Since its creation three years ago, the New York Works Capital Funding Program has made significant strides towards improving the infrastructure and amenities at parks and historic sites statewide. Funding from the New York Works Capital Program has modernized and replaced outdated bathhouses and bathrooms at parks across the state, increased the safety for hiking trails and helped increase overall visitation at our parks. Yet, despite this enormous progress, aging infrastructure, extreme weather conditions and a backlog of needed improvements continue to hinder our beloved state parks and historic sites. That is why it is critical that you approve the Governor's proposed \$110 million in New York Works Capital Program Funding.

In addition to the capital improvements done by OPRHP, grassroots organizations throughout the state provide vital contributions in the stewardship of our parks. These

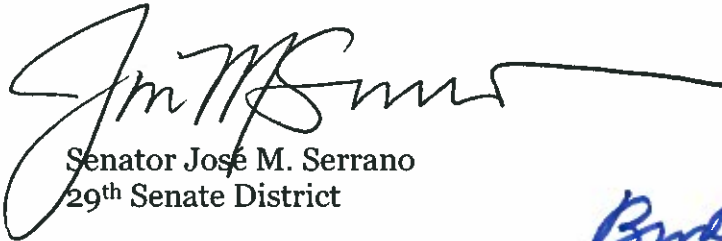
groups work voluntarily to provide routine maintenance, lead educational programs and promote and support the beauty that exists within our parks. By approving the proposed \$500,000 funding stream for capacity-building grants, these organizations will make an even greater contribution to our parks.

With a record-breaking 62 million visitors enjoying our parks last year, it is clear that parks play a vital role in the quality of life of so many New Yorkers. Parks provide important aesthetic, educational, and health benefits to people throughout the state. In addition, our parks system is a major economic engine for communities across the state. In fact, one recent study found that state parks create 20,000 tourism related jobs and generate \$2 billion in annual economic activity. Such an economic contribution is important to communities across the state, and in particular, communities in upstate New York. Lastly, and above all else, fully funding our parks ensure that New Yorkers can continue to enjoy a vital source of affordable recreational and cultural enrichment.

Your commitment to our parks has always been strong, as such I ask that we once again join together to ensure our parks continue to thrive. Therefore, we respectfully request that the final budget approve the Governor's proposals for the Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,


Senator José M. Serrano
29th Senate District

