H. R. _____

To promote environmental literacy.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. SARBAZES introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on ______

A BILL

To promote environmental literacy.

1 Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-
2 tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

3 SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

4 This Act may be cited as the “No Child Left Inside
5 Act of 2023”.

6 SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

7 Congress finds the following:

8 (1) Hands-on experiences in nature help build
9 stronger, smarter, and happier children.
(2) Children and young adults are increasingly disconnected from the natural world around them, spending less time outside playing, exploring, and learning.

(3) Quality education for students includes regular opportunities to make connections outside of the classroom.

(4) Environmental education, when integrated across the curriculum, has positive impacts on the development of important skills, such as critical thinking, problem solving, and citizenship and leadership skills.

(5) Every student should have the opportunity to participate in residential outdoor education programs or comparable outdoor education programs.

(6) Outdoor and environmental education programs have been shown to build critical thinking skills and leadership skills, and can improve student attendance and retention rates.

(7) Colleges, universities, and higher education associations play a critical role in cultivating the next generation of scientists, engineers, educators, planners, and business leaders for 21st century careers in the public and private sectors.
(8) Environmental education, as part of the formal prekindergarten through grade 12 school curriculum, has positive impacts on student achievement in all subjects, and especially in science, reading, mathematics, and social studies, and improves critical thinking skills, enthusiasm for learning, stewardship, and healthy lifestyles.

(9) The Partnership for 21st Century Learning identified environmental literacy as one of the key interdisciplinary themes critical to helping students to acquire the skills, knowledge, and expertise necessary to succeed in work and life.

(10) The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) rankings find that the United States is falling behind other nations in preparing students with the educational tools necessary to compete for the growing opportunities in the sciences, including careers related to the environment, natural resources, and energy.

(11) Forty-six States have developed, or are in the process of developing, environmental literacy plans to effectively integrate environmental education into the prekindergarten through grade 12 curriculum and to ensure that students graduate from high school environmentally literate.
(12) Support from the Department of Education is needed to help State and local educational agencies, and the partners of such agencies, implement environmental literacy plans and advance State curriculum frameworks for environmental and natural resource education that meets new State academic content and student achievement standards.

(13) Federal science agencies, natural resource agencies, and other agencies have important resources, including Federal lands and laboratories, content experts, data, and programs, that can inform and support State and local environmental literacy policies and programming.

SEC. 3. ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY.

Title IV (20 U.S.C. 7101 et seq.) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 is amended by adding at the end the following:

“PART G—ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY

“SEC. 4701. DEFINITIONS.

“In this part:

“(1) ELIGIBLE PARTNERSHIP.—The term ‘eligible partnership’ means a partnership that includes a local educational agency and not less than 1 of the following partners:
“(A) A Federal, State, regional, or local environmental or natural resource management agency, or parks and recreation department, that has demonstrated effectiveness, expertise, and experience in the field of environmental literacy, including the professional development of teachers.

“(B) A nonprofit organization that has demonstrated effectiveness, expertise, and experience in the field of environmental literacy, including the professional development of teachers, such as—

“(i) museums, as defined in section 273 of the Museum and Library Services Act (20 U.S.C. 9172);

“(ii) a teacher preparation program at an institution of higher education;

“(iii) the environmental or life sciences department of an institution of higher education;

“(iv) another local educational agency, a public charter school, a public elementary school or secondary school, or a consortium of such schools;

“(v) nature centers; or
“(vi) organizations with environmental education programming.

“(2) ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY.—The term ‘environmental literacy’ means—

“(A) a fundamental understanding of ecological principles, the systems of the natural world, the relationships and interactions between natural and man-made environments, and the skills to apply such understanding in real-world settings; and

“(B) having the ability, both individually and together with others, to make informed decisions concerning the environment, having the will to act on those decisions to improve the well-being of other individuals, societies, and the global environment, and participating in civic life.

“(3) ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY PLAN.—The term ‘environmental literacy plan’ means a plan developed, approved, or sponsored by a State educational agency in consultation with State environmental agencies, State environmental education associations, and State natural resource agencies, and with input from the public, that—
“(A) prepares students to understand ecological principles, the systems of the natural world, and the relationships and interactions between natural and man-made environments, and to apply such knowledge in real-world settings;

“(B) provides field and hands-on experiences as part of the regular school curriculum and creates programs that contribute to healthy lifestyles through outdoor recreation and sound nutrition;

“(C) provides environmental service learning opportunities;

“(D) provides targeted professional development opportunities for teachers that improve—

“(i) environmental and natural resource content knowledge of teachers;

“(ii) pedagogical skills in teaching about the environment, including the use of—

“(I) interdisciplinary, field-based, and research-based learning; and
“(II) science, technology, engineering, and mathematics content knowledge and tools; and
“(iii) the ability and confidence to use school buildings and grounds as a context for learning;
“(E) describes the measures the State will use to assess the environmental literacy of students, including—
“(i) relevant State academic content standards and content areas regarding environmental education, and courses or subjects where environmental education instruction will be integrated throughout the prekindergarten through grade 12 curriculum; and
“(ii) a description of the relationship of the plan to the secondary school graduation requirements of the State;
“(F) describes the outdoor learning spaces the State makes available to local educational agencies;
“(G) describes how the State educational agency will implement the plan, in partnership with nongovernmental organizations, Federal
agencies, State environmental agencies, State environmental education associations, State natural resource agencies, and local educational agencies, including how the State educational agency will secure funding and other necessary support;

“(H) is periodically updated by the State educational agency not less often than every 5 years;

“(I) utilizes school building and grounds as a context for learning;

“(J) describes teacher professional development needs; and

“(K) develops and describes a plan to adopt best management practices for early childhood environmental education, including guidelines for time in outdoors, outdoor space design, and learning context.

“(4) HIGH-NEED LOCAL EDUCATIONAL AGENCY.—The term ‘high-need local educational agency’ means a local educational agency—

“(A) with respect to which not less than 20 percent of the children served by the agency are children from low-income families;
“(B) that serves not fewer than 10,000 children from low-income families;

“(C) that meets the eligibility requirements for funding under section 5211(b); or

“(D) that meets the eligibility requirements for funding under section 5221(b).

“(5) HIGH-NEED SCHOOL.—The term ‘high-need school’ means a public elementary school or secondary school that is located in an area in which the percentage of students from families with incomes below the poverty line is 30 percent or more.

“(6) OUTDOOR SCHOOL EDUCATION PROGRAM.—The term ‘outdoor school education program’ means a multi-day educational program that delivers outdoor hands-on learning experiences, and that—

“(A) addresses community needs and contexts;

“(B) takes place in a residential or day program setting;

“(C) provides field study opportunities for students;

“(D) is integrated with local school curricula and support students in meeting State standards; and
“(E) provides students with opportunities to develop leadership, critical thinking, and problem solving skills.

SEC. 4702. GRANTS FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY PLANS.

“(a) Program Authorized.—From amounts appropriated to carry out this section, the Secretary shall award grants to States to enable the States to award subgrants, on a competitive basis, to eligible partnerships to support the implementation of the State environmental literacy plan.

“(b) Application.—

“(1) In general.—A State that desires a grant under this section shall submit an application to the Secretary, at such time, in such manner, and containing such information as the Secretary may require.

“(2) Contents.—Each application under this subsection shall—

“(A) include the State’s environmental literacy plan and information on the status of implementation of such plan;

“(B) describe how funds received under this section will assist the State in furthering
the implementation of the State’s environmental literacy plan;

“(C) describe the process the State will use to make subgrants to eligible partnerships; and

“(D) describe the process the State will use to evaluate the impact of the activities assisted under this section.

“(c) PEER REVIEW.—The Secretary shall—

“(1) establish a peer review process to assist in the review of grant applications under this section;

“(2) appoint individuals to the peer review process who—

“(A) are representative of parents, teachers, State educational agencies, State environmental agencies, State natural resource agencies, local educational agencies, and nongovernmental organizations; and

“(B) are familiar with national environmental issues and the health and educational needs of students; and

“(3) include, in the peer review process, appropriate representatives from the Department of Commerce, the Department of the Interior, the Department of Energy, the Environmental Protection Agency, and other appropriate Federal agencies, to
provide environmental expertise and background for evaluation of the State environmental literacy plan.

“(d) ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENSES.—A State receiving a grant under this section may use not more than 2.5 percent of the grant funds for administrative expenses.

“(e) STATE EDUCATIONAL AGENCY REPORT.—

“(1) IN GENERAL.—Each State receiving a grant under this section shall prepare and submit an annual report to the Secretary containing information about—

“(A) the implementation of the environmental literacy plan; and

“(B) the grant activities supported under this section.

“(2) REPORT REQUIREMENTS.—The report required by this section shall be—

“(A) in the form specified by the Secretary;

“(B) based on the State’s ongoing evaluation activities; and

“(C) made readily available to the public.

“(f) SUBGRANTS AUTHORIZED.—

“(1) SUBGRANTS TO ELIGIBLE PARTNER-SHIPS.—From amounts made available to a State educational agency under subsection (a), the State
educational agency shall award subgrants, on a competitive basis, to eligible partnerships serving the State, to enable the eligible partnerships to carry out the authorized activities described in subsection (h).

“(2) DURATION.—The State educational agency shall award each subgrant under this section for a period of not more than 3 years.

“(3) PRIORITY.—In making subgrants under this section, a State shall give priority to eligible partnerships that include a high-need local educational agency.

“(4) SUPPLEMENT, NOT SUPPLANT.—Funds provided to an eligible partnership under this section shall be used to supplement, and not supplant, funds that would otherwise be used for activities authorized under this section.

“(g) APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS.—

“(1) IN GENERAL.—Each eligible partnership desiring a subgrant under this section shall submit an application to the State educational agency, at such time, in such manner, and accompanied by such information as the State educational agency may require.

“(2) CONTENTS.—Each application submitted under paragraph (1) shall include—
“(A) a description of teacher professional
development needs with respect to the teaching
and learning of environmental content;

“(B) a description of how the eligible part-
nership will utilize school facilities and grounds
as tools for teaching and learning of environ-
mental content;

“(C) an explanation of how the activities to
be carried out by the eligible partnership are
expected to improve student academic achieve-
ment and strengthen the quality of environ-
mental instruction;

“(D) a description of how the activities to
be carried out by the eligible partnership—

“(i) will be aligned with challenging
State academic content standards and stu-
dent academic achievement standards
under section 1111(b)(1) in environmental
education, to the extent such standards
exist, and with the State’s environmental
literacy plan; and

“(ii) will advance the teaching of
interdisciplinary courses that integrate the
study of natural, social, and economic sys-
tems, and that include strong field compo-
nents in which students have the opportunity to directly experience nature through outdoor environmental learning;

“(E) a description of how the activities to be carried out by the eligible partnership will ensure that teachers are trained in the use of field-based or service learning to enable the teachers—

“(i) to use the local environment and community as a resource; and

“(ii) to improve student understanding of the environment and increase academic achievement;

“(F) a description of—

“(i) how the eligible partnership will carry out the authorized activities described in subsection (h); and

“(ii) the eligible partnership’s evaluation and accountability plan described in subsection (i); and

“(G) a description of how the eligible partnership will continue the activities funded under this section after the grant period has expired.

“(h) AUTHORIZED ACTIVITIES.—An eligible partnership shall use the subgrant funds provided under this sec-
tion for 1 or more of the following activities related to
elementary schools or secondary schools:

“(1) Providing targeted, job-embedded profes-
sional development opportunities for teachers that
improve the teachers’ environmental content knowl-
edge and pedagogical skills in teaching about the en-
vironment, including in the use of—

“(A) interdisciplinary, research-based, and
field-based learning; and

“(B) technology in the classroom.

“(2) Establishing and operating environmental
education summer workshops or institutes, including
follow-up professional development for elementary
and secondary school teachers, and preschool teach-
ers, as appropriate, to improve pedagogical skills
and content knowledge for the teaching of environ-
mental education.

“(3) Developing or redesigning more rigorous
environmental education curricula that—

“(A) are aligned with challenging State
academic content standards in environmental
education, to the extent such standards exist,
and with the State environmental literacy plan;
“(B) advance the teaching of interdisciplinary courses that integrate the study of natural, social, and economic systems and that include strong field components.

“(4) Designing programs to prepare teachers at a school to provide mentoring and professional development to other teachers at such school to improve teacher environmental education content knowledge and pedagogical skills.

“(5) Establishing and operating programs to bring teachers and students into contact with working professionals in environmental fields to deepen such teachers’ knowledge of environmental content and research practices.

“(6) Creating initiatives that seek to incorporate environmental education within teacher training programs or accreditation standards, consistent with the State environmental literacy plan.

“(7) Promoting the integration of outdoor environmental education lessons into the regular school curriculum and schedule in order to further the knowledge and professional development of teachers and help students directly experience nature.

“(8) Creating or improving outdoor learning spaces on school grounds.
“(i) Evaluation and Accountability Plan.—

“(1) In general.—Each eligible partnership receiving a subgrant under this section shall develop an evaluation and accountability plan for activities assisted under this section that includes rigorous objectives that measure the impact of such activities.

“(2) Contents.—The plan developed under paragraph (1) shall include measurable objectives to increase the number of teachers who participate in environmental education content-based professional development activities.

“(j) Report by Eligible Partnerships.—Each eligible partnership receiving a subgrant under this section shall report annually, for each year of the subgrant, to the State educational agency regarding the eligible partnership’s progress in meeting the objectives described in the accountability plan of the eligible partnership under subsection (i).

“(k) Authorization of Appropriations.—There are authorized to be appropriated such sums as may be necessary to carry out this section for fiscal year 2024 and each of the 4 succeeding fiscal years.
“SEC. 4703. OUTDOOR SCHOOL EDUCATION PILOT PROGRAM.

“(a) GRANTS AUTHORIZED.—From funds appropriated to carry out this section, the Secretary shall make grants to eligible partnerships to establish or expand outdoor school education programs.

“(b) APPLICATION.—

“(1) IN GENERAL.—An eligible partnership that desires a grant under this section shall submit an application to the Secretary, at such time, in such manner, and containing such information as the Secretary may require.

“(2) CONTENTS.—Each application under this subsection shall describe the outdoor school education program to be carried out and how such program will—

“A) improve student academic achievement as defined in the State plan under section 1111(c);

“B) promote the development of leadership skills;

“C) increase student engagement in education;

“D) improve critical thinking skills;

“E) provide opportunities for civic engagement and service learning;
“(F) address inequities of outdoor educational opportunities for underserved children in the State; and

“(G) improve student access to, and success in, well-rounded educational experiences.

“(c) PRIORITY.—The Secretary shall give priority to applicants that propose to serve high-need schools.

“(d) GEOGRAPHIC DIVERSITY.—In making awards under this section, the Secretary shall ensure that grants are awarded to eligible partnerships serving urban, rural, and suburban local educational agencies.

“(e) REQUIRED USES OF FUNDS.—Eligible partnerships awarded grants under this section shall use such funds for outdoor school education programs that—

“(1) provide a residential, hands-on educational experience, or an equivalent combination of classroom-based and outdoor educational experience, that reflects local community needs and contexts, featuring field study opportunities for students, which may include learning about—

“(A) soil, water, plants, and animals;

“(B) the role of natural resources industries, including timber, agriculture, fisheries, and others, in the economy of the State;
“(C) the interrelationship of nature, natural resources, economic development, and career opportunities in the State; and

“(D) the importance of the State’s environmental and natural resources;

“(2) are integrated with local school curricula in a manner that assists students in meeting State standards related to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, and international standards related to science;

“(3) provide students with opportunities to develop leadership, critical thinking, and decision-making skills;

“(4) provide students with opportunities to learn about the interdependence of urban and rural areas; and

“(5) provide professional development for educators to effectively implement outdoor school education programs.

“(f) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There are authorized to be appropriated such sums as may be necessary to carry out this section for fiscal year 2024 and each of the 4 succeeding fiscal years.
“SEC. 4704. REPORT TO CONGRESS.

“Not later than 2 years after the date of enactment of the No Child Left Inside Act of 2023 and every 2 years thereafter, the Secretary shall submit a report to Congress that—

“(1) describes the programs assisted under this part;

“(2) documents the success of such programs in improving national and State environmental education capacity; and

“(3) makes such recommendations as the Secretary determines appropriate for the continuation and improvement of the programs assisted under this part.”.

SEC. 4. CONFORMING AMENDMENT.

The table of contents in section 2 is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 4644 the following:

“PART G—ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY

"Sec. 4701. Definitions.
"Sec. 4702. Grants for implementation of environmental literacy plans.
"Sec. 4703. Outdoor school education pilot program.
"Sec. 4704. Report to Congress.”.

SEC. 5. AVAILABILITY OF OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY INFORMATION.

(a) Other Federal Agency Environmental Literacy Assistance Programs.—The Secretary of Education shall request that all Federal agencies provide in-
24 

formation on any environmental literacy assistance pro-
gram operated, sponsored, or supported by such Federal 
agency, including information about the application proce-
dures, financial terms and conditions, and other relevant 
information for each program, and each Federal agency 
shall promptly respond to surveys or other requests from 
the Secretary of Education for the information described 
in this subsection.

(b) Public Information.—The Secretary of Edu-
cation shall ensure that not later than 90 days after the 
Secretary of Education receives the information required 
under subsection (a), the eligibility requirements, applica-
tion procedures, financial terms and conditions, and other 
relevant information for each environmental literacy as-
sistance program offered by another Federal agency are 
searchable and accessible through the Department of Edu-
cation’s website and cross-referenced with the United 
States Green Ribbon School application information, in a 
manner that is simple and understandable for local edu-
cational agencies and communities.

SEC. 6. FEDERAL INTERAGENCY COORDINATION ON ENVI-
RONMENTAL LITERACY.

(a) In General.—The Secretary of Education shall 
coordinate environmental literacy activities between the 
Department of Education, the Department of Agriculture,
the Department of Energy, the Environmental Protection
Agency, the Department of the Interior, and the Depart-
ment of Commerce, the Department of Health and
Human Services, the National Science Foundation, the In-
stitute of Museum and Library Services, and the National
Aeronautics and Space Administration, including by car-
rying out the activities described in subsection (b).

(b) COORDINATION ACTIVITIES.—In coordinating en-
vironmental literacy activities, the Secretary of Education
shall—

(1) assess Federal environmental education pro-
grams, goals, and budget items across agencies;

(2) assess environment-based science, tech-
ology, engineering, and mathematics achievement
to demonstrate that learning about and in the envi-
ronment is an effective strategy for increasing en-
gagement in learning and academic achievement in
science, technology, engineering, and mathematics
subject areas; and

(3) produce adaptable environmental literacy
plan guidelines and identify coordinated resources
across Federal agencies that States and local edu-
cational agencies can follow as States and local edu-
cational agencies work to develop environmental lit-
eracy plans and programs of their own.
(c) ADVISORY PANEL.—The Secretary of Education shall appoint an advisory panel of stakeholders, including representatives from State educational agencies, local educational agencies, businesses, and nonprofit organizations that are engaged in local environmental literacy efforts representing the geographic, economic, and cultural diversity of the United States, who shall meet quarterly to advise and support interagency planning and assessment regarding environmental literacy activities.

(d) REPORT TO CONGRESS.—Not later than 1 year after the date of enactment of this Act, and annually thereafter, the Secretary of Education, the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, the Secretary of the Interior, and the Secretary of Commerce shall prepare and submit a joint report to Congress containing information about the coordination of environmental literacy activities between Federal agencies.