

WASHINGTON – Today, U.S. Representative Mike Quigley (D-IL) called on lawmakers to build coalitions between advocacy groups and education policymakers, modeled off of a recent effort in Chicago to promote environmental literacy. Quigley introduced a new bill to support the comprehensive initiatives of the Chicago Wilderness Alliance and the “Children’s Outdoor Bill of Rights,” which is designed to promote the outdoors as a vital part of childhood education.

“Encouraging children to get outside is a core part of a healthy planet and healthy children,” said Congressman Quigley. “Chicago has offered a perfect example to Washington of what can be achieved when progressive groups and government advocates unite behind a worthy cause. In order provide our children with a broad education and a greener future, we must continue to devote resources to our open spaces and parks, and encourage our kids to enjoy them.”

Outdoor activity has proven to aid academic performance, improve teenage behavior and health, and reduce the symptoms caused by Attention-Deficit Disorder. Beyond these benefits, children who grow up with an understanding of the land, air, and water surrounding them also grow up to be environmentally-conscious adults who are involved in efforts to clean, restore, and preserve our natural resources.

The Chicago Wilderness Alliance is made up of 240 environmentally-conscious organizations. In 2007, the Alliance introduced the “Leave No Child Inside” initiative to get more children to spend quality time participating in outdoor activities.

Last month, Quigley sent a letter to the Illinois State Board of Education supporting the creation of an Illinois State Environmental Literacy Plan. The plan would facilitate substantial federal education funding available to Illinois upon the passage of the No Child Left Inside Act (H.R. 2054), of which Quigley is a co-sponsor.

A lifelong advocate of green initiatives and conservation, Quigley often states that protecting the environment is why he “first got involved in politics.” Since his election to Congress, Quigley has voted for legislation to limit greenhouse gases and create green jobs (ACES), and supported a bill to increase fuel economy standards. He also voted for the popular “Cash for Clunkers” program to encourage Americans to purchase more environmentally friendly and fuel efficient cars.

U.S. Representatives Jesse Jackson, Jr. (D-IL) and Dan Lipinski (D-IL) are cosponsors of Quigley's legislation. The text of the bill is as follows.

Resolution (H. Res # forthcoming)

Supporting the initiatives of Chicago Wilderness and the Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights.

Whereas the Chicago Wilderness is an alliance of over 240 organizations that contribute toward the biodiversity and the quality of life in Chicago's metropolitan region;

Whereas in 2007, Chicago Wilderness launched the "Leave No Child Inside" initiative with the goal to get more children outside and to increase the amount and quality of time that they spend there;

Whereas unstructured, outdoor play is important for the wholesome, balanced development of the cognitive, emotional, social, and physical skills of children;

Whereas research has demonstrated that outdoor play helps children manage stress;

Whereas it is shown that natural spaces stimulate children's limitless imagination and foster creativity;

Whereas children who connect with nature become more inventive and better problem-solvers due to the hands-on learning that outdoor environments provide;

Whereas participation in wilderness therapy programs is associated with improved functioning

in the academic performance, interpersonal relationships, and household behavior of teenagers;

Whereas hiking and walking activities have been shown to lower high blood pressure, decrease anxiety, and combat obesity;

Whereas being active in outdoor activities, such as fishing, is correlated with reduced Attention-Deficit Disorder symptoms;

Whereas the presence of natural amenities near the homes of low-income urban children is associated with higher levels of cognitive functioning;

Whereas children who grow up spending time in nature are also more likely to be strong advocates for the environment when they reach adulthood;

Whereas the Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights joint resolution passed the State of Illinois; and

Whereas the Illinois General Assembly proclaimed June as "No Child Left Inside Month": Now, therefore, be it resolved, that the House of Representatives—

(1) supports the initiatives of the "Leave No Child Inside" initiative;

(2) encourages the President to issue a proclamation in support of the goals and ideals of the Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights;

(3) encourages other States and territories of the United States to support the goals and ideals of the "Leave No Child Inside" initiative;

(4) encourages media and press organizations to participate in the “No Child Left Inside Month”; and

(5) recognizes and encourages the Children’s Outdoor Bill of Rights commitment to fight obesity, physical disorders, and unawareness of natural amenities by promoting quality outdoor activities for children and adults.