

Written Testimony before the Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies of
the House Committee on Appropriations

Congressman Sean Casten

Chairwoman McCollum, Ranking Member Joyce, and Members of the subcommittee: Thank you for inviting me to testify today. I have come to urge you to support robust funding of the Urban and Community Forestry Program at the US Forest Service in the coming Fiscal Year. I applaud your hard work on ensuring a funding increase of \$2.5 million for a total funding of \$22.5 million last fiscal year. This program provides critical assistance to public-private partnerships that address regional climate change challenges by promoting healthy and diverse forests.

The scientific consensus could not be clearer: Climate change is an imminent threat to our health, our economy, and our national security – as well as the health of our forests. The Fourth National Climate Assessment released by the White House in November 2018 spells it out clearly: “As growing season temperatures rise, reduced tree growth or widespread tree mortality is expected.” This loss of vegetation could exacerbate the effects of climate change we’re already seeing. But this also means better managing our forests can be a part of the solution to the climate crisis.

The Chicago Region Trees Initiative (CRTI) is a great example of this solution. CRTI is a collaboration of more than 284 Chicago-area partners working to build healthier and more diverse urban forests. Their work involves the Morton Arboretum, U.S. Forest Service, several other federal agencies, seven Chicagoland counties and municipal governments, as well as business and community partners. CRTI has shown great success leveraging the power of a public-private partnership to strengthen and diversify our local urban forests.

We want to build on the success we’ve seen in Chicago: Replicating the program elsewhere and solidifying CRTI itself will greatly benefit urban forests across the country. Thank you for your consideration of my request and I hope you will join me in harnessing the power of our urban canopy to help solve the climate crisis.

Additionally, there is a critical need to restore and improve the urban forest in Region 9 due to catastrophic losses from Emerald Ash Borer and build resiliency to changing growing conditions by planting a diversity of trees and protecting existing trees. 81 percent of Americans live in urban areas where trees are critical to human health and to address the environmental impact of climate change. I urge the committee to prioritize the Forest Service’s regional, multi-organizational collaborations in urban communities most severely impacted by invasive species like the Emerald Ash Borer. These urban forest conservation partnerships provide models of best practices for effective landscape-scale community and urban forestry grants.