

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Huffman for holding this mark up and for this committee's consideration of my bill H.R. 5063, the Safe Beaches, Safe Swimmers Act.

I also want to thank Mayor Denise Bowden, the Committee staff and the Department of the Interior for working with my office to develop a practical solution that strengthens visitor safety while respecting the roles of both the federal government and our local communities.

Every summer, millions of Americans visit beaches and designated swimming areas managed by the National Park Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. At locations where the federal government provides seasonal lifeguard services, maintaining adequate staffing is essential to protecting public safety throughout the summer season.

Like employers across the country, the Department can occasionally face seasonal staffing challenges. This legislation ensures that temporary staffing shortages never result in diminished safety for the families who visit our public lands.

If a federal staffing shortage arises, local governments can partner with the Department to help maintain safe swimming operations because they understand how important these destinations are to their communities, local economies, and tourism. But local governments have sometimes been required to absorb costs that are ultimately the responsibility of the federal government.

While local communities have been willing partners in helping protect visitors when circumstances require, they should be able to count on our federal government to uphold their end of the bargain on federal lands.

H.R. 5063 provides a practical, long-term framework to address these situations whenever they arise.

When the Department of the Interior determines that a designated federal swimming area cannot be adequately staffed because of a genuine lifeguard shortage, the Secretary may enter into an agreement with one or more local

governments to provide qualified lifeguards. Just as importantly, those local governments will be reimbursed for the reasonable costs they incur in providing those services.

This legislation does not create a new bureaucracy. It does not establish a new grant program. And it does not shift responsibility away from the federal government.

Instead, it gives the Department a flexible tool to ensure visitor safety is never compromised by an unexpected staffing shortage, while protecting local taxpayers from bearing costs that are ultimately the responsibility of the federal government.

The bill is also carefully tailored. It applies only when the Secretary determines that a true staffing shortage exists, not routine scheduling issues or temporary employee absences. It also applies only to designated swimming areas that are normally monitored by federally employed lifeguards.

This establishes a permanent framework so the Department and local governments can respond quickly whenever staffing challenges arise, ensuring designated swimming areas remain safely staffed without interruption.

Ultimately, this is about protecting families who visit our public lands, supporting the local communities that welcome those visitors every year, and ensuring that federal agencies have the flexibility they need to keep America's beaches safe.

This is a common-sense measure that helps ensure America's federal beaches remain safe for families today and well into the future. I respectfully ask for the Committee's support of H.R. 5063.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.