

**Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib – House Natural Resources Committee –  
Legislative Hearing – Environmental Justice in Recreation Permitting  
Act**

June 8, 2021

- Thank you, Chairman Neguse, I'm excited to testify on behalf of my bill, the Environmental Justice in Recreation Permitting Act. Secretary Haaland introduced this bill last term and I'm thrilled to have such a great partner to help implement it now.
- Public lands belong equally to all of us. Regardless of where we live or how much money we have – our national parks and forests were designed to give everyone the opportunity to experience the natural beauty of our country.
- For people who live in environmental justice communities like those in Michigan's 13<sup>th</sup> district – typically communities of color and low-income communities subjected to a disproportionate amount of pollution and health impacts – our federal public lands can often feel a million miles away.
- When you are living in an environmental justice community with polluted air and water, what some of my residents call sacrifice zones, you're not likely to feel any connection to our pristine public lands.
- But groups across the country like Outdoor Afro are fighting to change that, making outdoor recreation, nature, and conservation accessible to everyone.
- In Detroit, we are fortunate to have the National Wildlife Federation's Detroit Leadership and Environmental Education program, or D-LEEP. This program connects Detroit students to the environment through a project-based, outdoor, environmental curriculum that is cultivating a new generation of conservation leaders in EJ communities.

- In its very first year, with all the challenges of the COVID pandemic, 32 students and their family members went on more than 40 hikes and nature excursions all across Michigan, from visiting the incredible Sleeping Bear Dunes in Northern Michigan to producing 10 gallons of maple syrup in Detroit's Rouge Park.
- The effects these experiences have had on Detroit's youth are immeasurable. One student said "I've always been afraid to go in forests, but now I love hiking, me and my grandmother go hiking together on the weekends." One student trying kayaking for the first time said "I didn't know I would be so good at this!"
- This is why I'm so excited to be talking today about the Environmental Justice in Recreation Permitting Act. While these groups are doing incredible work, the federal government can do so much more to facilitate these connections between EJ communities and public lands.
- My bill by requires the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture to complete an interagency report studying the use of special recreation permits by EJ communities, identify barriers and best practices, and make recommendations for federal action to increase public land recreation access.
- Facilitating connections between EJ communities and public lands is just the beginning of winning true environmental justice for our residents.
- The 13th and so many other communities across the country like it not only deserve the ability to experience and enjoy the clean air and lands of our country's great national parks and forests, but also to have their children grow up knowing what fresh air actually feels like in their own back yards.

- These are not new problems. For generations, millions of Americans, mostly Black and brown, have grown up believing like I did that the smell of sulfur dioxide is normal, or that their smog-filled skies are like everyone else's.
- No one deserves to live under these environmental conditions simply because that's where they were born. No one deserves to have their lifespan cut short by decades because of what zip code they were born in.
- As a Congress, we must do more to help these communities. I thank my colleague Chairman Neguse for holding this hearing today, and I look forward to working with you all further to infuse environmental justice into everything the federal government does.

### **PANEL 3 – Expert Witness Panel – Questions**

- Thank you Chairman Neguse.
- We are fortunate today to be joined by Rue Mapp, founder of Outdoor Afro, a national nonprofit with networks in 33 states and the District of Columbia, operating in 56 cities across the country.
- Outdoor Afro supports Black environmental leadership and reconnects Black people with the outdoors through welcoming, culturally-responsive, nature-based experiences.
- Outdoor Afro's leaders frequently utilize federal public lands and special recreation permits for paddling expeditions, backpacking trips, and so much more.

- **Ms. Mapp, thank you for joining us today to talk about the EJ in Recreation Permitting Act and the great work Outdoor Afro does.**
  - **Can you explain how this bill will support Outdoor Afro's first priority of connecting Black people to the outdoors?**
  - **Can you explain what it means to “reimagine Blackness in the outdoors” and how this bill helps?**
  - **Why is it so important to incorporate Black history and cultural knowledge into nature-based experiences? What myths are you fighting against?**
  - **How do racial disparities in the leadership of environmental organizations impact access to public lands for residents of EJ communities?**
- **Thank you Chairman Neguse, I yield back.**