

Statement for the Record
U.S. Department of the Interior
House Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Federal Lands
Legislative Hearing on
H.R. 4931, National Park System Long-Term Lease Investment Act
H.R. 5063, Safe Beaches, Safe Swimmers Act
H.R. 5254, Gateway Partnerships Act of 2025
H.R. 4671, Ensuring Casualty Assistance for Firefighters Act

December 2, 2025

Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and members of the Subcommittee, the Department of the Interior (Department) is pleased to provide this statement for the record on the following legislation: H.R. 4931, National Park System Long-Term Lease Investment Act; H.R. 5063, Safe Beaches, Safe Swimmers Act; H.R. 5254, Gateway Partnerships Act of 2025; and H.R. 4671, Ensuring Casualty Assistance for Firefighters Act.

H.R. 4931, National Park System Long-Term Lease Investment Act

The Department recognizes the potential for H.R. 4931 to significantly enhance the National Park Service's (NPS) ability to manage leases by granting the NPS the authority to extend lease terms non-competitively but has concerns about the implementation framework in the legislation as drafted. We would like to work with the sponsor and the Committee to ensure the bill is implemented effectively.

H.R. 4931 would provide the NPS with the authority to extend any lease issued per 36 CFR Part 18 without initiating a new competitive solicitation process, as long as certain conditions are met. This flexibility will help ensure that well-maintained and beneficial leases can continue, supporting the ongoing stewardship of our national parks.

We appreciate that H.R. 4931 grants the Secretary of the Interior additional authority to extend leases. However, as currently drafted, the bill could allow many existing leases to be extended repeatedly without clear limits on duration. Without such parameters, there is a risk of reducing transparency, limiting opportunities for new and future businesses to lease NPS properties, and potentially constraining the government's ability to ensure long-term public benefit. We would welcome the opportunity to further discuss the bill with the sponsor and the Committee and to provide additional recommendations and comments, including technical assistance to strengthen the implementation framework.

H.R. 5063, Safe Beaches, Safe Swimmers Act

The Department does not object to H.R. 5063, but would like to work with the bill sponsor and Committee on amendments.

H.R. 5063 directs the Secretary of the Interior to assess lifeguard staffing levels at beaches managed by the National Park Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the Bureau of Reclamation. If a staffing shortage is identified, the Secretary must seek to enter into agreements with local government agencies to provide lifeguard services. These agreements would ensure that qualified local lifeguards can monitor designated swim locations during normal seasonal hours and ensure visitor safety by providing rescue and first aid services as needed. Additionally, H.R. 5063 guarantees that local government agencies are fully reimbursed for all reasonable costs incurred in providing lifeguard services under such agreements. This includes amending any existing agreements to ensure full reimbursement, even if the original terms did not include cost-sharing provisions.

The Department recognizes the importance of visitor safety and appreciates the bill's intent to allow for continued lifeguard coverage when federal staffing is insufficient. However, lifeguard staffing needs, authorities, and operational conditions vary dramatically across beaches managed by the Department's bureaus, and a rigid statutory mandate could create fiscal and operational difficulties, especially in areas where lifeguarding is not traditionally offered, is not feasible, or where partnerships cannot be safely or lawfully implemented. Therefore, we recommend allowing the Secretary to exercise discretion and to seek agreements only when the Secretary determines that partnerships are practicable and in the public interest.

H.R. 5254, Gateway Partnerships Act of 2025

The Department does not object to H.R. 5254, but would like to propose amendments.

H.R. 5254 authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to enter into an agreement with the Gateway Arch Park Foundation (Foundation) to host private events in Gateway Arch National Park (Park), including Park buildings. It requires that the agreement include provisions to protect park resources and values, limit activity to those consistent with the Park, ensure compatibility with National Park Service (NPS) policy, and implement a fee on the Foundation to cover maintenance, administrative, and personnel costs. Furthermore, the bill clarifies that it does not prevent the NPS from hosting events or issuing permits to other entities for special events in the Park.

The NPS appreciates the immense value that our philanthropic partners provide by securing critical funding for park projects and operations, building stronger community connections, expanding storytelling, and enabling conservation and infrastructure projects that would otherwise not be possible, ultimately helping to sustain the national parks for future

generations. The Foundation has served in these roles since its formation in 2009 as part of the public-private partnership to fund and coordinate the CityArchRiver Project, which transformed and enhanced the Arch experience for everyone.

The Department notes that the agreement authority provided by H.R. 5254 would be precedent-setting. If enacted, this would be the first time the NPS has entered into an agreement to allow for the exclusive after-hours use of a NPS visitor center by a philanthropic partner. While the Department sees potential benefits, such authority warrants monitoring to ensure it does not unintentionally impact visitor access, security operations, or expectations at other parks. Therefore, we recommend that the legislation be amended to sunset five years after enactment. A time-limited authority would allow the NPS to evaluate the operational, financial, and policy implications of exclusive after-hours use of a visitor center, and to report to Congress whether the authority should be extended, modified, or allowed to expire. This is consistent with our commitment to data-driven decision-making and responsible stewardship of public resources.

We welcome the opportunity to work with the bill sponsor and the Committee to refine this legislation. We would be pleased to provide amendment language upon request.

H.R. 4671, Ensuring Casualty Assistance for Firefighters Act

The Department supports H.R. 4671 and would be pleased to work with the sponsor and the committee to ensure its effective implementation. H.R. 4671 establishes the Wildland Fire Management Casualty Assistance Program to provide support for the next-of-kin of wildland firefighters and support personnel who suffer illness, sustain critical injuries, or lose their lives in the line of duty.

H.R. 4671 creates structured next-of-kin notifications for families of wildland firefighters and support personnel who perish or require hospitalization due to duty-related injuries or illness. The bill authorizes the Department to reimburse next-of-kin for travel expenses incurred when visiting hospitalized firefighters or supporting families in the event of a line-of-duty death. Furthermore, this legislation authorizes the Department to train personnel specifically for casualty assistance responsibilities and provides survivors rapid access to expert case managers and counselors.

The bill also establishes a website that would offer personalized and integrated information on all federal benefits and financial assistance available to survivors. Additionally, H.R. 4671 designates liaisons within the Department, Department of Justice, and Social Security Administration to facilitate through benefit-related issues for survivors. Finally, the bill establishes data collection—conducted in consultation with the United States Fire Administration and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health—on both the incidence and quality of casualty assistance provided to survivors.

While the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service (USFS) has a formal Casualty Assistance Program, the Department has lacked a similar legally designated program for its wildland fire personnel. As a result, the Department's bureaus—including the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service—have had to develop their own support systems for wildland firefighters and support personnel who suffer illness, sustain critical injuries, or lose their lives in the line of duty. While the Department's bureaus offer important assistance to next of kin after wildland fire personnel casualties or injuries, the absence of a formal, legally designated Casualty Assistance Program has limited the Department's ability to provide the same level of coordinated support that is available to USFS personnel. This legislation would provide the Department the necessary legal authority to deliver better, faster care for survivors or injured wildland fire personnel.

In response to President Trump's Executive Order 14308, the Department is taking action to streamline wildfire management by consolidating its bureau wildland fire programs into a single, unified U.S. Wildland Fire Service. This legislation will equip the Department with the necessary legal authority to effectively support its wildland fire personnel, ensuring greater coordination and efficiency under one unified service. This proposed bill will significantly strengthen and clarify the Department's authority to support wildland fire personnel and their families.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a statement for the record on this legislation.