



A Banner Day for Environmental Education

Environmental education and the No Child Left Inside Act took center stage on Earth Day during a field hearing of the Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education subcommittee of the House Education and Labor Committee.

The day began at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel, Maryland, with more than 60 students taking part in a series of outdoor environmental learning activities. Maryland Gov. Martin O'Malley, Rep. John P. Sarbanes of Maryland and Rep. Dale Kildee of Michigan, the subcommittee chairman, took part and were delighted with the students' energy and engagement.

The subcommittee, appropriately enough, held its hearing outside, overlooking a beautiful lake, osprey flying overhead, geese honking in the distance and more than 200 people in attendance (and aired on C-SPAN). At the hearing, chaired by Rep. Kildee, several witnesses outlined the enormous value of environmental education in the proposed NCLI Act, of which Rep. Sarbanes is the lead House sponsor.

Witnesses included Dr. Robert S. Lawrence of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, who talked about the profound benefits that children receive from being outside and the pressing need to educate young people about the environment and the challenges it faces.

Governor O'Malley outlined his new [executive order](#) creating a state Partnership for Children in Nature that will create new ways to get kids outside to play and learn. And the Partnership will develop a state environmental literacy plan to ensure that all Maryland students are environmentally literate – making Maryland a leader in this field.

Maryland State Superintendent of Schools Nancy S. Grasmick emphasized the value of environmental education and outlined the initiatives now in place in the state's schools. Chairman Kildee also offered his strong support for environmental education and reminisced about his days as a teacher in Michigan, when he discovered that students thrived when taken outside for lessons. Also taking part in the hearing and offering support for the legislation were Rep. Raul M. Grijalva of Arizona and Del. Madeleine Bordallo of Guam.

The NCLI Coalition was well represented by William C. Baker, president of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, who expressed support for the NCLI Act during a press conference with Rep. Sarbanes and Governor O'Malley.

Members of the NCLI Coalition played a major role in making the hearing a success, working in partnership with Rep. Sarbanes' staff to coordinate student activities and help arrange witnesses. In addition, Coalition members from around the country helped make the case by submitting written testimony to the committee.

The hearing received wide press coverage ([here](#), [here](#) and [here](#), for examples) and represented a major step forward in the Coalition's push to expand federal support for environmental education. And we have seen enormous interest in our work, with more than three dozen groups joining the Coalition this week. Today, we have more than 235 organizations as members, representing more than 20 million people.

Please share this account of the hearing with your members and others. And for more information, visit www.nclicoalition.org.