



## NCEL Outdoor Engagement Spotlight Minnesota Representative Jamie Becker-Finn

Representative Jamie Becker-Finn sponsored Minnesota's No Child Left Inside ([HF 133](#)). The program provides grants to schools and organizations to help get more children outdoors.

### How do you engage with the outdoors and why is outdoor engagement important to you?

My favorite way to engage with the outdoors is as a hunter and angler but I also know that any time I spend outdoors improves my overall mood and energy level. Even small things like a short bike ride, walking my dog, or time in the garden can be really beneficial. Outdoor engagement is important to me because it gets me out of my own head and refocuses me on what's important. Nature is powerful and there is so much we as humans can't control. I think it's important to be reminded of that.



### What led you to choose outdoor engagement legislation and what was the impact of your policy?

I grew up in the woods and on the lakes of rural northern Minnesota and it shaped who I am now in a really positive way. I've always been really intentional to make sure my own kids have those same experiences, even if we live in a suburban area. I knew that many of their friends and classmates weren't getting access to the outdoors in the same way. We passed "No Child Left Inside" legislation to fund small grants to schools and other groups, with priority given to programs that will benefit kids who otherwise wouldn't have access to meaningful engagement with the outdoors. Demand for the grants was incredibly high and hundreds of kids in our state have now benefited from local programs getting them outside.

### How did the NCEL network and other state models help you in this process?

One of my mentors, Rep. Rick Hansen, knew I was interested in this type of legislation and tuned me in to the resources available through NCEL. We also borrowed the catchy name from another state.

### How can outdoor engagement make communities safer and more resilient in response to racial injustice and the COVID-19 pandemic?

Spending more time outdoors is beneficial in so many ways - mood, mental health, physical fitness, etc. We know that it impacts your brain in really positive ways. Especially during a time that is so heavy and difficult in so many ways, I think the outdoors can provide some respite, even if small. As far as racial justice, I also think a lot about public land and access to outdoor space. People of color, and others without means, are often disproportionately impacted by this lack of access and then don't get the benefits of being outside. This was part of the reason we crafted the No Child Left Inside legislation towards those who otherwise wouldn't have those opportunities.