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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION
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HIGHWAYS AND TRANSIT
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HAZARDOUS MATERIALS

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE,
AND TECHNOLOGY
INVESTIGATIONS AND OVERSIGHT
(RANKING MEMBER)

September 16, 2025

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker of the U.S. House of
Representatives
H-232, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Minority Leader of the U.S. House of
Representatives
2267 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Thune
Majority Leader of the U.S. Senate
511 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader of the U.S. Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chair, House Committee on Appropriations
H-307 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member, House Committee on
Appropriations
2413 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Susan Collins
Chair, Senate Committee on Appropriations
S-128, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Vice Chair, Senate Committee on
Appropriations
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear House and Senate Leadership and Appropriators,

I write to express my deep concerns over the \$1.2 billion in proposed cuts to the National Parks Service requested by the current Administration in their Fiscal Year 2026 Budget Request. These cuts would have a severe impact on National Parks across the country, but would be especially damaging for the Cuyahoga Valley National Park, located in Ohio's Thirteenth Congressional District. Cuyahoga Valley National Park contributes over \$225 million in economic impact per year while supporting 2,000 jobs, and a loss in federal dollars could have devastating effects on the park and its surrounding communities.¹ As such, I respectfully request that the National Parks Service receive robust funding in the Fiscal Year 2026. Without this critical funding, Northeast

¹ "Tourism to Cuyahoga Valley National Park Contributes \$225 Million to Local Economy." National Parks Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, [www.nps.gov/cuva/learn/news/tourism-to-cuyahoga-valley-national-park-contributes-\\$225-million-to-local-economy.htm](https://www.nps.gov/cuva/learn/news/tourism-to-cuyahoga-valley-national-park-contributes-$225-million-to-local-economy.htm). Accessed 10 Sept. 2025.

Ohio risks losing one of its greatest national treasures that communities rely on for economic stability.

Originally established as the Cuyahoga Valley National Recreational Area under President Gerald Ford in 1974 and renamed thanks to efforts by Congressman Ralph Regula in 2000, the Cuyahoga Valley National Park (referred to in this letter as simply “The Park”) is the twelfth most visited National Park in the country, attracting more than 2.9 million visitors a year.² Covering over 33,000 acres along the Cuyahoga River, this National Park has drawn visitors from across the country to my district for over 50 years. According to a National Park Service report, the 2.9 million annual visitors to the Park spent \$139 million in nearby communities in 2023, supporting more than 2,100 jobs in the local area and creating a cumulative benefit to the local economy of \$225 million.³ The Park is beloved by local communities with an active volunteer base of more than 4,600 people a year contributing 109,000 hours of service across the park.⁴ From wayfinding and interpretive support to trail maintenance and special events, volunteers play a vital role in enriching the visitor experience.

Even as the federal funding for the National Park Service has decreased over the years, the staff at the Cuyahoga Valley National Park have continued to keep the Park as a top destination for travelers and community members alike. However, repeated cuts and staffing shortages have taken their toll. Cuyahoga Valley National Park is still recovering from the Trump Administration’s hiring freeze earlier this year, and as of April 2, only 18 seasonal staff members had been hired compared to the typical 40-45 seasonal staff.⁵ These shifts in resources lead to missed opportunities and deferred maintenance, leading to park infrastructure that is unsightly, unsafe, more susceptible to damage, and can deteriorate more quickly. While the Park has benefited greatly from the Great American Outdoors Act’s National Parks and Public Lands Legacy Restoration Fund, this program has depleted its funding and must be reauthorized and appropriated, making funding cuts even more detrimental to the Park.

My district is also home to another National Park Service site, the National First Ladies’ Library and Museum, which is visited by tens of thousands of park visitors each year and serves as the nation's only showplace to honor America's iconic First Ladies.⁶ Established in October 2000, the facilities include galleries, a research library, conference and seminar rooms, a Victorian theater, a gift shop, archival storage and processing rooms, and administrative offices. The Museum currently holds over 5,000 artifacts related to the First Ladies as well as more than 1,000 books and scholarly papers. Attendance at the Library and Museum requires an active and well-maintained National Park, and without federal funding to help ensure this, this nation could

² *When Was That? Key Dates in Making Cuyahoga Valley National Park* (U.S. National Park Service). (2018). Nps.gov. <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/cuyahoga-valley-key-dates.htm>.

³ U.S. Department of the Interior. (n.d.). Visitor spending effects. National Parks Service. <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/socialscience/vse.html>.

⁴ K. LoVano, email, September 10, 2025.

⁵ Advocacy – Conservancy for Cuyahoga Valley National Park. (2025). Conservancyforcvnp.org. https://www.conservancyforcvnp.org/advocacy/?fbclid=IwQ0xDSwMAoL5jbGNrAwCgpmV4dG4DYWVtAjExAAEqOvgH_oTHvHeWk3_sbCTHDPTPrz_R60a-IclzntD9PIgiH9Zk-dnCWin6gc_aem_xSYqDczHT-Qh-EfHwWbexA.

⁶ “About the National First Ladies Library and Museum.” National First Ladies, firstladies.org/about/about-us. Accessed 10 Sept. 2025.

lose the only site in the world dedicated to preserving and appreciating the legacies our First Ladies have played in shaping American history.

Another integral feature of Cuyahoga Valley National Park is the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad (CVSR). Since its partnership with the National Park Service began in 1989, this non-profit heritage railroad has helped make the park more accessible to more than 200,000 visitors each year. Today, riders of all ages enjoy educational programming, seasonal events, and unforgettable views as they explore one of the nation's most unique scenic national park experiences. The Cuyahoga Valley National Park is the only park in the U.S. with a heritage railroad operating within its boundaries. The economic impact of CVSR is equally significant. Studies consistently show that visitors to the Park contribute millions of dollars to the local economy each year through lodging, dining, retail, and recreation. With close to 40% of CVSR guests visiting trains from outside of Ohio, the CVSR is an instrumental catalyst in creating jobs, and supporting local businesses in surrounding communities from Independence to Akron.

While the CVSR does not receive any direct ongoing financial support from the federal government, reductions in federal support for national parks, and by extension the Cuyahoga Valley National Park, directly affect CVSR's ability to operate as their success is inextricably dependent on the vitality of the Park itself. Without adequate funding, critical infrastructure, visitor services, and conservation programs will be diminished, reducing the visitor experience, constraining operations, and weakening the economic and cultural value that CVSR and the Park jointly provide.

In light of these considerations, I respectfully request that the National Parks Service be fully funded in the Fiscal Year 2026. The Cuyahoga Valley National Park is a treasure to Northeast Ohio and Ohio's Thirteenth Congressional District, and adequate funding is essential to maintain the Park's condition for millions of visitors year-round and to provide economic support for local communities.

Thank you for your attention and careful consideration of this matter. I look forward to your favorable response and to the opportunity to collaborate on this critical issue in the future.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Emilia Strong Sykes', with a stylized, flowing script.

Emilia Strong Sykes
Member of Congress
13th Congressional District of Ohio