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Stone Legislation Promotes Environmental Science Education for Underserved Communities

SACRAMENTO--Assemblymember Mark Stone (D-Monterey Bay) has introduced legislation that would provide education about the environment and outdoor recreation for California children, prioritizing opportunities for underserved and at-risk students.

“In many underserved communities, participation in outdoor environmental education and recreation programs are the only exposure kids have to nature and the environment,” said Stone. “Outdoor environmental education provides students with memorable real-world experiences with the environment, which increases interest in science and environmental stewardship.”

Specifically, AB 1603 establishes an Outdoor Environmental Education Program under the California Department of Parks and Recreation. Grants would be awarded to education programs that are operated by public entities or nonprofit organizations. The bill prioritizes organizations that work to increase the ability of underserved and at-risk populations to participate in outdoor recreation and educational activities. Priority would also be given to programs that align with Common Core standards and integrate instruction in science, technology, engineering and mathematic (STEM) subjects.

“Few funding sources now exist for something that enhances academic achievement, critical thinking and lifetime environmental stewardship among students,” said Dan Haifley, Executive Director of the O’Neill Sea Odyssey, a non-profit organization dedicated to teaching students about marine life and the ocean environment. “Our own studies found that outdoor environmental education has a profound beneficial impact on lower income youth.”

During his first term in the Assembly, Stone has emerged as a leader on environmental protection and an advocate for children living in underserved communities. Stone has fought to curb illegal coastal development, reduce plastic pollution, and clean up drinking water supplies. In his capacity as Chair of the Select Committee on Coastal Protection, he has held hearings investigating threats to the Pacific Ocean, oil spill prevention efforts, and plastic garbage effects on the coastal environment. As Chair of the Assembly Committee on Human Services, he leads policy decisions on child welfare, foster care, developmental disability services, temporary cash assistance, and CalFresh food benefits.

Assemblymember Stone’s website: www.asmdc.org/stone

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