

**STATEMENT OF CHRIS FRENCH
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Before the
SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS, FORESTS, AND MINING
Regarding
S.3366 GOLD STAR FAMILIES PARKS PASS ACT
September 16, 2020**

Chairman Lee, Ranking Member Wyden, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) views on S.3366, the Gold Star Families Parks Pass Act, which would make the National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands pass free for Gold Star Families. The Administration supports our military, veterans, and Gold Star Families. The Department believes free access to national parks and other Federal lands should be extended to all veterans and Gold Star Families. We support this bill to respect the ultimate sacrifice of our Gold Star Families by allowing them to connect to their public lands, and we share the interest in recognizing the service and sacrifice that this bill is designed to honor.

The Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA), enacted in 2004, authorizes the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), National Park Service (NPS), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) to collect and retain revenue and requires that fee revenue be used to enhance the visitor experience. The bill would allow exceptions to the FLREA recreation pass requirement and may have a material financial impact on Forest Service recreation programs. The Forest Service relies on recreation fee revenue derived from the FLREA for basic operations, to prevent our recreation sites from

becoming a deferred maintenance issue, to better manage our federal lands, and to respond quickly to changes in visitation levels. We would like to work with the Committee and our partner land management agencies regarding implementation of the bill, such as verification of Gold Star Family members' eligibility at Federal recreation sites.

USDA supports the goals of this bill, to support Gold Star Families as they supported our country by selflessly sharing their loved ones for the cause of freedom. That concludes my testimony, Mr. Chairman. I would be happy to answer any questions you or the other members have for me.