

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 16, 2016

The Honorable Richard C. Shelby,  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science,  
and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Barbara A. Mikulski,  
Vice Chairwoman  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science,  
and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Shelby and Vice Chairwoman Mikulski:

We are writing to request your continued support for the John H. Prescott Marine Mammal Rescue Assistance Grant Program (or Prescott Program) in the Fiscal Year 2017 Commerce Justice Science appropriations legislation. The Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) mandated that NOAA create a Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program to a coordinate volunteer National Stranding Network of registered marine mammal response centers across the country. These programs are often privately funded, associated with universities, aquariums, research institutions or non-profit organizations. From its inception in 2000 through 2015 the Prescott Program Network responded to an average of 5,856 animal strandings per year.

The federal government does not have response or rehabilitation capabilities for sick or injured marine mammals, even if those animals are endangered or have become injured due to anthropogenic causes like an oil spill or ship strike. The MMPA authorized NOAA to partner with Stranding Network members as a cost effective, regional method to respond to sick and injured marine mammals. The Prescott Program awards competitive grants that have been awarded to 24 states and 2 territories leading to 120 peer reviewed scientific studies and the discovery of 10 infectious diseases. For each Prescott Grant dollar, the Stranding Network partners leverage an additional \$10 dollars.

Historically, El Niño conditions have resulted in high numbers of marine mammal strandings, likely due to changes in prey availability. Last year, more than 3,000 sea lions were found stranded on Southern California beaches, more than the previous five years combined. Already in 2016, 425 strandings have been responded to. In addition to sea lions, stranding rates of threatened fur seals have also increased. Prescott funds are critical to respond to extreme events such as those being experienced in California, as well as to understand the causes and consequences of environmental changes on marine mammal mortality.

Stranding networks are important to wildlife health and response, but also important to monitoring overall ocean health and potential threats to public health. Marine mammals are the ocean's canary in the coal mine. In California, days before harmful algal blooms impact our food supply, sick sea lions wash ashore. The Stranding Network is trained to identify these symptoms in marine mammals and notify local public health agencies. In many cases, this collaboration prevents people from getting foodborne illnesses.

Lastly, Prescott grant funding has been instrumental in stranding response for endangered marine mammals. In Washington state, Prescott dollars were used to rescue, rehabilitate and release Springer, a

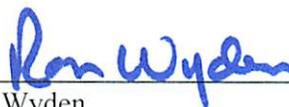
Southern resident orca. Springer's successful reintegration into her pod's social structure and the birth of her first calf, a much needed contribution to the threatened Southern Resident whale population, are a testament to the conservation goals that can be achieved through Prescott grants. In Hawai'i, NOAA has estimated that 30% of the current endangered Hawaiian monk seal population is alive today because of recovery efforts. Prescott funds have assisted in developing captive care and emergency response which has been vital to Hawaiian monk seal conservation.

We appreciate your continued support of NOAA's John H. Prescott Marine Mammal Rescue Assistance Grant Program. Without federal support for stranding response, the Stranding Network would not be able to maintain their current response capabilities for sick and injured marine mammals.

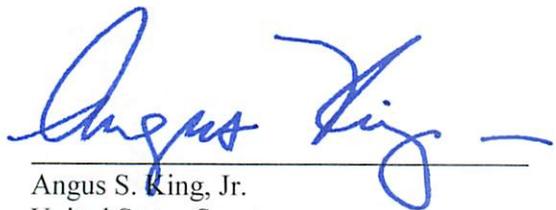
Sincerely,



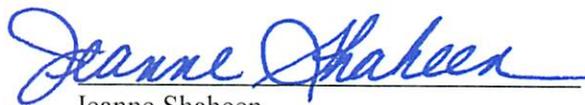
Maria Cantwell  
United States Senator



Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.  
United States Senator



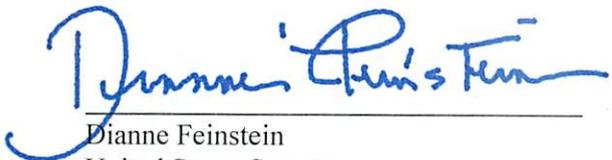
Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono  
United States Senator



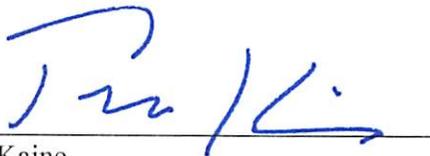
Dianne Feinstein  
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United States Senator



Brian Schatz  
United States Senator



Tim Kaine  
United States Senator

*Richard Blumenthal*

Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator