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LEON

**VIRGINIA "GINGER"
DELEGAL**
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

July 30, 2020

The Honorable Gus Bilirakis
United States House of Representatives
2227 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Dear Representative Bilirakis:

On behalf of the Florida Association of Counties, I write today in support of H.R. 4160, the Restoring Resilient Reefs Act (RRRA), introduced in the House by Representative Darren Soto and co-sponsored by ten other bi-partisan members of Congress from Florida, as well as several Representatives from other states. The companion legislation was introduced by Senators Marco Rubio, Rick Scott, Mazie Hirono, and Brian Schatz and has been reported favorably by the Senate Commerce Committee. The legislation is supported by the five counties of southeast Florida, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission, among others.

As you may know, this bi-partisan, bi-cameral legislation would modernize the Coral Reef Conservation Act of 2000, provide funding to states and territories to help implement projects and programs to help the reefs, create an emergency program to get additional aid to areas that most need it, allow states and locals to have a greater say in the management of the restoration of the reefs, and maintain a federal NOAA reef presence to allow states and territories to still benefit from their technical expertise.

The RRRA is critical to for the future of our reefs and we ask that you co-sponsor it. We have never been so close to helping to modernize the Coral Reef Conservation Act. With your help, we can ensure the nation's ecologically and economically important coral reefs persist for future generations.

Meanwhile, another bill regarding coral reefs, H.R. 6738, was recently introduced. However, we still support the RRRA for several reasons. First, Florida would receive between \$4 and \$8 million annually under the RRRA for coral activities, yet under H.R. 6738, the state would continue to only receive between \$700,000 and \$1 million. Broadly speaking, the bill ostensibly "strengthens" the federal response to coral reef management at the expense of state and local leadership. This perpetuates the status quo, which has not worked. The bill prescribes a one-size-fits-all management regime across seven different states and territories with varying management capacities and reef conditions. The bill also dedicates more money to NOAA overhead, thereby further reducing the amount of funding spent on restoration. Finally, we do not believe H.R. 6738 can pass the Senate. For those reasons and more, we ask that you not support that bill and instead support the RRRA.





If you have not already cosponsored the RRRA, please do so now. We believe coral reefs deserve the same broad support from the Florida Congressional delegation as other issues like Florida's Everglades or opposition to offshore drilling do and we need your support to pass the bill.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions or concerns, please let us know.

Sincerely,

Melissa McKinlay
President, Florida Association of Counties

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