

February 17, 2026

The Honorable Erin Houchin
342 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Erin,

I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing to bring to your attention several urgent concerns regarding Versailles State Park, Indiana's second-largest state park, which plays a vital role in the community of Versailles and the greater Tri-State area.

Versailles State Park is a cornerstone for local families, visitors, and businesses alike. During the 2023/2024 fiscal year, the park attracted an impressive 331,495 visitors. Despite this high volume, key facilities including the visitor center, children's discovery areas, trails, pavilions, and playgrounds are not maintained to the standard expected for a park of this size. Playground equipment is outdated, public amenities such as grills and picnic tables have not been replaced or properly stained, and essential maintenance of the lake, central to recreational activities like kayaking and fishing, is at risk due to insufficient preservation funding.

It is imperative to preserve the natural beauty and recreational opportunities Versailles State Park offers, including:

- **Water Activities:** A lake providing fishing, boating, and a large swimming pool, with rentals available for canoes, rowboats, and kayaks.
- **Trails:** Extensive networks designed for mountain biking, hiking, and horseback riding.
- **Camping:** Over 220 electric campsites and a group camp facility that must remain fully operational to continue serving the public.

These amenities are essential not only for community enjoyment but also for attracting visitors who support local businesses and contribute to the area's economic vitality.

The Friends of Versailles State Park, the Ripley County Chamber of Commerce, and many generous local donors have contributed significant time and resources to help maintain the park at its current level. Our collective hope is that with improved and sustained funding, beyond routine maintenance, these resources can be leveraged to encourage more events, attract additional visitors, and generate increased revenue benefiting both the park and the local economy.

A critical infrastructure concern is the wastewater system servicing the park, currently governed by a contract with the Town of Versailles. Rising water usage has exceeded the terms of this contract, placing strain on the system and eventually, local taxpayers. Investment in new wastewater infrastructure is urgently needed to accommodate current and future demands. Revisiting and updating the contract with the Town of Versailles is essential to ensure reliable service, moving forward.

Transparency is also a significant issue. Although funds have previously been allocated for lake dredging, this maintenance has not been performed. The public deserves clear explanations regarding the use of these funds and the reasons for the delay. Greater openness around planning documents

and financial records related to the park would help build trust. Additionally, making future plans for the lake and dam publicly accessible rather than available only by request, would encourage community engagement.

Furthermore, the Polar Plunge event, which benefits Special Olympics Indiana, has been informed it must relocate in the near future, suggesting that the decision to remove the lake may already be underway. This not only impacts a beloved community event but also highlights broader effects on statewide charitable activities and tourism.

Although not explicitly stated publicly, the attached Department of Natural Resources (DNR) document alludes to imminent plans to deconstruct the existing dam due to cost concerns. While the dam has historically been a local tourism draw, questions remain about the thoroughness of environmental impact assessments, particularly regarding downstream sediment displacement following removal. The apparent lack of ongoing dam maintenance increases uncertainty about the transparency and rigor of these evaluations. It is crucial that the community receives a clear explanation as to why preservation and maintenance efforts have not been undertaken.

We also seek clarity on how the public can become involved and informed regarding the State's plans for future maintenance and critical repairs, which are vital to preserving the park's role in tourism and community life. The potential removal of all water-related activities would have a significant impact. Moreover, neighboring counties could benefit from lessons learned through this process to better understand how public park resources are managed, maintained, and transparently reported.

As a local small business owner, I submit this letter so that others may hear, learn, and become more involved in preserving this beautiful park, which is so vital to our community.

In summary, we respectfully request your assistance in:

- Facilitating greater transparency by making plans for Versailles State Park, including the lake and dam, publicly accessible.
- Investigating and clarifying the status and use of funds previously allocated for lake dredging and dam maintenance.
- Support investment in new wastewater infrastructure and revisiting the contract with the Town of Versailles to ensure sustainable water management. If not attended to, this could be a greater cost impact of an investment to reinstate the park's own station.
- Reviewing and addressing the funding, maintenance, and preservation needs of the park to meet the standards expected by taxpayers and visitors.
- Supporting legislative action to ensure sustainable management and oversight of the park's critical resources.
- Providing clear guidance for public involvement and education regarding maintenance plans and critical repairs, including any planned stages or strategic plans.
- Encouraging the sharing of insights from this process with neighboring counties to promote broader understanding and best practices.
- Considering the impact on community and statewide events such as the Polar Plunge and working to preserve venues vital to these activities.
- Assisting in educating our communities about the relationship between park visitation per capita and actual funding.

- Advising us on how we can support collective efforts to preserve this valuable public resource.

Thank you for your attention and consideration. We look forward to your leadership in securing a sustainable and vibrant future for Versailles State Park, which remains deeply woven into the fabric of our community and essential to the quality of life for residents and visitors alike.

Sincerely,

Candice Dahline
Versailles, IN Small Business Owner
Dahline Ins and Fin Svcs, Inc.

