



Charles F. Sams III
Director, National Park Service
1849 C St., NW
Washington, DC 20240

May 19, 2023

RE: Cashless Entry Fee Requirement at National Parks

Dear Mr. Sams,

The National Parks Service (“NPS”) website¹ confirms information contained in a May 3, 2023 Travel and Leisure article² regarding the NPS’s policy to no longer accept entry fees in United States currency at many National Parks. We are deeply concerned for all Americans, particularly children, who will be affected by your policy.

*“United States coins and currency (including Federal reserve notes and circulating notes of Federal reserve banks and national banks) are legal tender for all debts, **public charges**, taxes, and dues. Foreign gold or silver coins are not legal tender for debts.”* 31 USCS § 5103 (emphasis supplied).³

Simply put, your cashless policy is illegal. According to the law, NPS shall not deny entrance to an individual tendering U.S. currency.

The cashless policy likely will more profoundly impact persons of color and will deny lower income households the enjoyment of many of our magnificent National Parks. This should trouble you as greatly as it does me. The fairly well-to-do consider electronic payment an everyday event. However, according to a March 2022 Federal Reserve Bank of New York report,⁴ only half of low-income households have access to a credit card. According to a Government Accountability Office report,⁵ Black and Hispanic households are about 60% less likely than White households to have a bank account.

¹ <https://www.nps.gov/search/?query=cashless&sitelimit=%2F&affiliate=nps>

² <https://www.travelandleisure.com/national-parks-going-cashless-7488450>

³ https://www.govregs.com/uscode/title31_subtitleIV_chapter51_subchapterI_section5103

⁴ <https://www.newyorkfed.org/medialibrary/media/press/the-state-of-low-income-america-credit-access-debt-payment-march-2022>

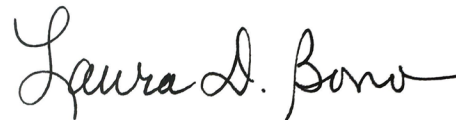
⁵ <https://www.gao.gov/blog/more-7-million-u.-s.-households-have-no-bank-account.-why>

We trust you will cancel this unlawful policy to ensure that there need be no further action taken. Please bear in mind the words of Stephen Mather, first director of the National Park Service:

“The primary duty of the National Park Service is to protect the national parks and national monuments under its jurisdiction and keep them as nearly in their natural state as this can be done in view of the fact that access to them must be provided in order that they may be used and enjoyed. All other activities of the bureau must be secondary (but not incidental) to this fundamental function relating to care and protection of all areas subject to its control.”

I thank you for your prompt attention to this important issue. Please feel free to contact me at (202) 854-1310.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laura D. Bono". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Laura Bono
Acting President
Children's Health Defense