STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY
LANSING

RICK SNYDER
GOVERNOR

DAN WYANT
DIRECTOR

TO: Members of the Michigan Congressional Delegation

FROM: Dan Wyant, Director

DATE: May 29, 2012

SUBJECT: Beaches Environmental Assessment and Coastal Health Act (BEACH Act) Funding

The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) is requesting your help on an important issue that will greatly impact Michigan's ability to assess water quality at beaches and protect human health. Over the past nine years, the MDEQ has distributed $280,000 of BEACH Act funds per year to local partners for monitoring Great Lakes beaches. These funds have been vital for the creation and maintenance of a statewide beach monitoring program in Michigan. However, President Obama's proposed fiscal year 2013 budget recommends that no funding be allocated to the BEACH Act program because the "non-federal agencies now have the ability and knowledge to run their own programs without federal support." We strongly disagree with this statement for the reasons provided below.

Our knowledge of the water quality at Great Lakes beaches and our ability to implement the requirements of the BEACH Act have been limited because the program has not been fully funded. In fact, only about one-third of the original authorized level of funding has been distributed to the states. This reduced funding has also created a disparity in the allocation of funds to the individual states. The allocation formula used to distribute the funds was supposed to be based equally on three criteria (beach season, beach miles, and beach use); however, as a result of the reduced funding, one of the criteria (beach season) has been used to allocate the majority of funds. This has resulted in an unfair distribution of funds to Michigan and other states with long coastlines, large coastal populations, but relatively short beach seasons. The United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) highlighted this problem in their May 2007 report on Great Lakes beaches (GAO-07-591).

The BEACH Act significantly increased our ability to monitor Great Lakes beaches, notify the public of conditions at beaches, improve our understanding and identification of contamination sources, and advance the scientific methods and technology for analyzing water quality.

- Michigan has over a thousand public beaches located on inland lakes and on the Great Lakes. The BEACH Act funds have allowed local health departments to monitor approximately 200 of the 608 Great Lakes beaches. The BEACH Act funds have also allowed the MDEQ to use all of the available state beach monitoring funds to help local health departments monitor and protect about 200 of the 573 beaches on inland lakes. Without BEACH Act funds, the monitoring effort in the state of Michigan will most likely return to 2002 levels, resulting in the reduction of the number of beaches monitored to approximately 100 for the Great Lakes and 100 for inland lakes.

- The MDEQ, with help from local partners and federal agencies such as the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and United States Geological Survey, is working to resolve contamination problems at Great Lakes beaches. During the 1990s, about 15 Great Lakes beaches were identified as having contamination problems. With the help of BEACH Act funding, an average of 60 Great Lakes beaches with contamination problems have been identified each year. The MDEQ has completed a Total Maximum Daily Load for seven of these beaches with eight more scheduled. In addition, the MDEQ with its partners are using over $3 million from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) to investigate and reduce sources of contamination that have impacted 224 Great Lakes beaches. Without BEACH Act funds, we will be limited in our ability to assess the success of these improvements.

- The BEACH Act provides critical funding that encourages the development and use of rapid methods for testing beaches. Current methods provide test results in 18 to 24 hours. The MDEQ and its partners are leading the way in the development and testing of new rapid methods that provide results in less than 60 minutes. The development of a rapid test method will better protect human health because it will allow beach advisories to be issued soon after a water sample is collected. This is also timely work since the new Recreational Water Quality Criteria that the USEPA plans to publish in 2012 will most likely include new rapid methods.

In summary, we encourage you to seek full funding for the BEACH Act so that we can continue our important work to protect human health at Great Lakes beaches. This is extremely poor timing for the elimination of BEACH Act funds since the USEPA is in the process of publishing new Recreational Water Quality Criteria, which may require additional monitoring. In addition, BEACH Act funds will be needed to monitor the water at beaches to assess whether the GLRI projects have successfully removed the sources of contamination.

Thank you for helping us to protect Michigan's beaches and human health. Should you require further information, please contact Shannon Briggs, Surface Water Assessment Section, Water Resources Division, MDEQ, at 517-335-1214, or you may contact me at 517-373-7917.

cc: Bill McBride, Governor's Washington Office
Eric Brown, Governor's Washington Office
Jim Sygo, Deputy Director, MDEQ
Jamie Clover Adams, Director of Policy and Legislative Affairs, MDEQ
Maggie Cox, Legislative Liaison, MDEQ
Brad Wurfel, Communications Director, MDEQ
William Creal, MDEQ
Shannon Briggs, MDEQ