

**Statement of Rep. Frank Pallone**  
**Senate Subcommittee on Transportation Safety Infrastructure**  
**Security and Water Quality**

**Hearing on Protecting Water Quality at America's Beaches**  
**Wednesday, June 27, 2006**

I would first like to thank Chairman Lautenberg and Ranking Member Vitter for conducting this important hearing. This is an issue that Chairman Lautenberg and I have worked for a long time to clean up and protect our national beaches.

Across the country, American families and international tourists make over 2 billion trips each year to America's beaches to fish, sunbathe, boat, swim, surf, and bird-watch. Our coastal areas produce 85 percent of all US tourism dollars, fueling a huge economic engine.

Our nation's beaches are vital, not only to residents of our coastal states but also for countless visitors who come to visit each year. Our beaches are a tremendous resource for those who come here to enjoy them, and they are a huge economic engine for our coastal states. In New Jersey alone beaches are the primary driver of a tourism economy that means nearly 500,000 jobs and generates \$36 billion in economic activities for the state each year.

Next weekend for the 4th of July, thousands of people will flock to New Jersey beaches to enjoy everything they have to offer, to celebrate our nation's independence. During the 4th of July Celebration we want to be sure that our beaches are clean and safe for beachgoers.

**2000 BEACH ACT**

And thanks to the BEACH Act, a law that I helped to author with Senator Lautenberg back in 2000, we have made major strides over the last six years. The BEACH Act of 2000 helped us improve water quality testing and monitoring at beaches across the country, which is critical to protecting the health of beachgoers.

The Act had three provisions: requiring states to adopt current EPA water quality criteria to protect beachgoers from getting sick; requiring the EPA to update these water quality criteria, with new science and technologies to provide better, faster water testing; and providing grants to states to implement coastal water monitoring programs.

New Jersey used some of its grant money to become the first state in the nation to launch a real-time website that notifies beachgoers of the state of their beaches.

**THE BEACH PROTECTION ACT**

Despite all the strong steps that coastal states and our nation have taken since the BEACH Act was signed into law, this Act can still be improved, and that's what Senator Lautenberg and I had in mind when we introduced the BEACH Protection Act of 2007.

The BEACH Protection Act, H.R. 2537, is a bill that will help ensure that beachgoers throughout the country can surf, swim, and play on clean and safe beaches.

This legislation not only reauthorizes the grants to states through 2012, but doubles the annual grant levels from a total \$30 million under the old authorization to a new level of \$60 million annually.

H.R. 2537 will expand the scope of BEACH Act grants from water quality monitoring and notification to also include pollution source tracking and prevention efforts.

More importantly this legislation goes further on environmental standards than any before. It requires tougher standards for beach water quality testing and communication.

The bill requires that beach water quality violations are disclosed not only to the public but to all relevant state agencies with beach water pollution authority.

### **RAPID TESTING METHODS**

The Beach Protection Act mandates the use of rapid testing methods by requiring the EPA to approve the use of rapid testing methods that detect bathing water contamination in 2 hours or less. Grantees must use those methods within one year of approval.

This is something that I have been advocating for the last couple of years. Current water quality monitoring tests, like those used in New Jersey, only test for bacteria levels and take 24 to 48 hours to produce reliable results, during which time many beachgoers can be unknowingly exposed to harmful pathogens. More immediate results would prevent beaches from remaining open when high levels of bacteria are found.

We are requiring each state receiving BEACH Act grants to:

- Implement measures for tracking and identifying sources of beachwater pollution;
- Create a public online database for each beach with relevant pollution and closure information posted; and
- Ensure that closures or advisories are issued shortly after the state finds coastal waters out of compliance with water quality standards.

We are also holding states accountable by requiring the EPA Administrator to do annual reviews of grantees' compliance with BEACH Act process requirements. Grantees have one year to comply with the new environmental standards, otherwise they will be required to pay at least a 50 percent match for their grant until they come back into compliance. (Current law gives the Administrator discretion to require a non-federal share of up to 50 percent.)

Mr. Chairman, protecting our coasts and oceans is critical to the local economies that depend on them for billions in tourism and recreation revenues.

Once again I would like to thank the Chairman and the Ranking member for holding this hearing and for their leadership on this important issue. I look forward to working with my colleagues across the Capitol on protecting New Jersey's, and our nations, beaches for years to come.