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Organization: Crux Wilderness Therapy

Title: Vice President

Comments: I am the Vice President and on the Board of Directors for an amazing nonprofit 501c3 organization called Crux Wilderness Therapy. At Crux we provide long term sustainable mental health resources to ALL active duty military service members, veterans, and their families through climbing oriented recreational therapy. We host outdoor climbing clinics and events each weekend rotating around Southern California where vets and active duty members can come learn how to safely transition from gym to crag, learn how to get into traditional climbing, or just come hang out with other veterans to "get away" and climb for a bit to escape whatever they are currently dealing with for a bit. Without fixed anchors this would be entirely impossible and our ability to operate would be crushed almost instantly. The wild majority of what we do for the veteran community is done by setting us safe top rope systems off of these fixed anchors so beginner climbers can safely climb these routes that we use. We use these fixed anchors ourself to be able to safely set up these ropes and the clients use them to be able to climb safely. Without bolts our entire organization would not exist.

I discovered climbing after my last deployment with the Navy before I separated. I was in a severely bad place mentally after the long trip overseas and was scrambling to find any way to improve my own mental health. A friend who was a climber brought me out for a day of climbing and it changed my life. It was the first time in years I had felt true peace and presence for even a brief moment while I was on the rock. Now I run this non profit to bring others to the same revelation I had. I cannot overstate how impactful the outdoors have been for me and specifically the outdoors as it relates to climbing and the technically engaging aspect of vertical movement. The program we have been using for decades works very well and climbing is shockingly safe compared to most other hobbies due to the efficacy of the internally regulated system we have been using. The proposed system would essentially be a moratorium on development and the members who wrote this bill don't understand that because they clearly don't understand how development work. This is especially important at a time where climbing is growing exponentially thanks to more and more people discovering how beneficial it can be. These fixed anchors are absolutely necessary for the safety of the community and in order for us to be able to continue operating to serve the veteran community.

Additionally I currently make a living as a professional alpine climber. It is absolutely impossible to even consider being able to descend from these large alpine routes without the use of "fixed anchors" including any rappel station at all. Many of these routes require on the spot innovation in order to get down safely, and by this bill's wording even me realizing I need to leave a small piece of gear behind would be illegal. This creates a situation where I will now have to decide between leaving something behind to safely rappel off of so I can make it down and home safely, or breaking the law and risk punishment. Anytime I am out in wilderness and come across anything left behind by climbers before me I always pack it out to clean up, as do all other climbers. It is the standard in our community to take care of the outdoors better than any other user group and we do this so we can continue to safely practice the sport we love. The result of this proposal would be beyond catastrophic to the mental health of tens of thousands of Americans who just want to be able to recreate on their public land safely. The climbing will never stop, this will just stop it being done safely.