

SB 680 - Support - State and Local Parks – Playgro

Uploaded by: Rachel London

Position: FAV



**Maryland Developmental
Disabilities Council**

CREATING CHANGE • IMPROVING LIVES

Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

SB 680: State and Local Parks – Playground Accessibility – Communication Boards

March 1, 2022

Position: Support

The Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council (DD Council) is an independent, public policy organization that creates changes to make it possible for people with developmental disabilities to live the lives they want with the support they need. The DD Council is led by people with developmental disabilities and their families. One of our priorities is to advocate for and fund inclusive recreation programs and activities that are fully accessible. This bill is another step towards doing just that. Communication boards help ensure that our public recreational spaces are inclusive and accessible to all people, particularly children with disabilities.

WHAT does this legislation do?

- This bill requires that the Department of Natural Resources and local governing bodies add a communications board to all public playgrounds in the State by October 1, 2027.

WHY is this legislation important?

- Only 33 of Maryland's State parks currently have accessible playgrounds, and this is one of many changes needed to make additional playgrounds accessible to children with disabilities. None of them have communication boards.
- A communication board is a device that displays photos, symbols, or illustrations to help people with limited language skills express themselves.
- Communications boards encourage a sense of community as well as an inclusive, more equitable play environment.
- Ultimately, It provides children with and without disabilities the opportunity to play at public playgrounds together.

SB 680 takes a proactive approach to ensuring that all children who use any form of communication feel included and comfortable when they visit public playgrounds, and is one of many actions that can move all of our parks towards accessibility for all Marylanders with disabilities.

Contact: Zach Hands, Communications and Legislative Liaison, zhands.mddc@gmail.com

SB680_The Arc Maryland_SWA.pdf

Uploaded by: Ande Kolp

Position: FWA



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SB680- State and Local Parks - Playground Accessibility - Communication Boards

March 1, 2022 at 1 pm.

Senate Education Health and Environmental Affairs Committee

Position: Support with Amendment

The Arc Maryland is the largest statewide advocacy organization dedicated to the rights and quality of life of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and we enthusiastically support SB680 with suggestions for what we perceive would be helpful amendments.

Augmentative and Alternative Communication Boards (AAC Boards) can be great tools to help children with nontraditional ways of communicating to interact with their friends. These boards are also fun and informative for typical communicators to use in play with each other. **We believe the existence of these boards as natural, expected components of a playground, will help to break down stigmas and normalize interactions between traditional and non-traditional communicators.** This will shape how children without disabilities perceive children who use AAC devices in the community and school, and will shape how students with disabilities who use AAC devices see themselves.

Playground communication boards have been placed in a few areas of Maryland with great effect. In Howard County for example, the county has installed large communication boards at Waverly, Cedar Lane, Bellows Spring, Clarksville, Dayton Oaks, Ilchester, Pointers Run and Rockburn Elementary Schools, and recently added a board to their community playground at Blandair Regional Park. According to the Howard County Autism Society, who helped fund and provide the boards, the community loves them and they get a lot of use.ⁱ

To use the communication boards, children point to pictures on the display to express their thoughts and feelings. The symbols on the board are typically selected from a licensed AAC symbol library, with selection assistance from speech-language pathologists specifically for use on playgrounds. The boards may also include braille, and are designed to encourage a sense of community as well as an inclusive, more equitable play environment.

Communication symbols should be logically categorized by their parts of speech for communication ease. Consistent arrangement of symbols from board to board and playground to playground helps to promote use and inspire confidence while building skills to engage in conversation and enhance literacy.ⁱⁱ

[Type here]

Just as our computer keyboards have consistent placement of all letters with numbers and function keys located predictably, and some keyboards contain additional options on the right or left of the letter board for flexibility, we recommend that the communication boards that are installed as a result of this legislation contain consistent (and consistently located) “Core” words and symbols in addition to optional “Fringe” (flexible) words.

Core Words are consistent words or word symbols used in a fixed location on a board to provide consistency from board to board for communication efficiency.

Fringe Words are words or word symbols that may vary from board to board, in a fixed location on a board, for activity-specific, location specific, or other flexible communication options.

Please refer to the diagram as an example of a board that contains Core and Fringe Words:



(Source: <https://www.closingthegap.com/talk-to-me-technologies-communication-boards-for-parks-playgrounds-schools-and-more/>)

[Type here]

We appreciate the opportunity to provide the following amendment suggestions for the Sponsor's consideration:

To Definitions:

5-2001.

Change: (B) "COMMUNICATION BOARD" MEANS A DEVICE THAT DISPLAYS PICTURE COMMUNICATION SYMBOLS WITH WORDS AND BRAILLE THAT IS USED TO SUPPLEMENT OR REPLACE SPOKEN LANGUAGE AS A MEANS OF EXPRESSION AND COMMUNICATION.

Add definitions:

Core Words

Core words are consistent words or word symbols used in a fixed location on a board to provide consistency from board to board for communication efficiency.

Fringe Words

Fringe words are words or word symbols that may vary from board to board, in a fixed location on a board, for activity-specific, location specific, or other flexible communication options.

5-2002

Change: ON OR BEFORE OCTOBER 1, 2027, THE DEPARTMENT AND EACH LOCAL GOVERNING BODY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF PLAYGROUNDS SHALL CONSTRUCT A COMMUNICATION BOARD IN EACH PLAYGROUND UNDER ITS JURISDICTION THAT:

- (A) Contains core communication symbols with words and braille that are reasonably consistent from board to board in each jurisdiction, in both content and layout.
- (B) May contain additional fringe vocabulary at the discretion of each jurisdiction.

In closing, we truly appreciate the Sponsor's leadership to create more inclusive, inviting, and welcoming places to play for all children and we ask for a favorable report on SB680 with amendments.

For more information, please contact:

Ande Kolp, Executive Director, akolp@thearcmd.org, ph: 443-851-9351

ⁱ <https://howard-autism.org/resources/hcas-resources/communication-boards-building-inclusive-playgrounds/>

ⁱⁱ <https://aacccommunity.net/citation/consistent-symbol-location-affects-motor-learning-in-preschoolers-without-disabilities-implications-for-designing-augmentative-and-alternative-communication-displays/>

SB0680-EHE_MACo_OPP.pdf

Uploaded by: Dominic Butchko

Position: UNF



Senate Bill 680

State and Local Parks – Playground Accessibility – Communication Boards

MACo Position: **OPPOSE**

To: Education, Health, and Environmental
Affairs Committee

Date: March 1, 2022

From: Dominic J. Butchko

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **OPPOSES** SB 680. This bill requires local parks departments to use local Program Open Space funds to purchase specific communication board technology for their recreation facilities.

In the over half-century since Program Open Space was implemented, the State of Maryland and its counties have been immensely successful at both expanding lands made available to the public and developing those lands into world class recreation facilities. Program Open Space has advanced numerous health and economic benefits to Marylanders, a central element in our state's "quality of life" proposition.

Historically, the General Assembly has also played an important role with the success of Program Open Space. Legislation has helped to prioritize its use for the balanced goals of land preservation and active resident access. This visioning role should remain the province of a citizen legislature, to guide and refine the scope of the program as times change. SB 680, however, goes beyond broad vision-setting and requires counties to use program funds to install potentially costly communication boards at each of their parks. Not only does mandating such an expense go against the original design of Program Open Space, but it also hampers a county's ability to pursue more cost effective or innovative solutions that may be more appropriate for their community.

If the Committee seeks to advance the availability of this technology for the use of park visitors, a central procurement with either planned use by local parks, or local opt-in to "ride" on the statewide contract, could promote wider adoption of this technology.

SB 680 could undermine a very productive state/local collaborative model for one of our state's showcase policy innovations in Program Open Space. The bill would impose a costly mandate on local parks departments, hampering counties' continued efforts with acquisition and park development. Accordingly, MACo requests a **UNFAVORABLE** report on SB 680.

SB680-Unfavorable-Fink-D32.pdf

Uploaded by: Nelda Fink

Position: UNF

UNFAVORABLE Testimony - SB 0680

Nelda Fink, 8372 Norwood Dr, Millersville

MD District 32

I oppose this legislation because clearly this signage/communications board will be used as another form of indoctrination and propaganda of our kids. As a believer in God and the natural, I don't want to see our parks and recreation areas cluttered with propaganda that this government thinks is necessary to display. Not a good use of the money. Stop cluttering the natural views. No signage or communication boards.

I am 100 % NOT IN FAVOR of SB 0680!

Nelda Fink

SB680 MACPRA Position 2-28-22 Communication Boards

Uploaded by: Steve Miller

Position: UNF



MARYLAND ASSOCIATION OF COUNTY
PARK & RECREATION ADMINISTRATORS
(MACPRA)

**SB680 State and Local Parks – Playground Accessibility – Communication
Boards**

Requiring the Department of Natural Resources and local governing bodies to construct communication boards in each public playground;

February 28, 2022

MACPRA Position: OPPOSE

The Maryland Association of County Park and Recreation Administrators recognizes the importance of inclusivity in State parks and locally operated playgrounds and parks. While the general purpose of SB680 aims to improve playground access through mandated communication boards, MACPRA opposes the legislation as written primarily because the prescribed mandate is funded through Program Open Space.

Program Open Space is a vital program for State and local agencies to address many different types of park needs. For smaller jurisdictions, Program Open Space funding represents the bulk of capital funding available for development and rehabilitation projects.

Though communication boards can be a valuable asset for local playgrounds, this mandate would be very expensive, costing up to \$2,000 per board. MACPRA believes that Program Open Space funds should not be restricted by legislated mandates and should remain in control of local jurisdictions through long-established processes that are already in place.

MACPRA urges the Committee to give an **UNFAVORABLE** report on this bill.

The Maryland Association of County Park & Recreation Administrators (MACPRA) is an affiliate of the Maryland Association of Counties and represents the Parks and Recreation departments of all 23 counties and Baltimore City – the professionals engaged in the delivery of Parks and Recreation services throughout Maryland.

SB0680_DNR_LOI_EHEA_3-1-22.pdf

Uploaded by: Bunky Luffman

Position: INFO



Larry Hogan, Governor
Boyd K. Rutherford, Lt. Governor
Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio, Secretary
Allan Fisher, Deputy Secretary

Bill Number: SB 680

Short Title: State and Local Parks - Playgrounds Accessibility - Communication Boards

Department's Position: Letter of Information

Explanation of Department's Position

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR or Department) provides the following information on SB 680, which requires the department and local governing bodies to construct a communication board in each public playground by October 1, 2027.

Maryland Park Service (MPS): SB 860 requires MPS to install communication boards at all 38 playgrounds around the state. The bill also requires the department to use Program Open Space (POS) funds provided under Section 5-904 of the Natural Resources Article for the construction of communication boards at playgrounds under their jurisdictions. POS funds are provided under Section 5-903 of the Natural Resources Article.

Program Open Space Local: The DNR Land Acquisition and Planning (LAP) Unit administers POS-Local, which provides financial and technical assistance to local subdivisions (counties and municipalities) for the planning, acquisition, and/or development of recreation land or open space areas. Projects funded through POS-Local are determined by the local jurisdictions that submit applications for funding to the Department for review and approval. While local governments apply for POS-Local funds to design and construct playgrounds, there are also other fund sources available for these types of projects, including local funds and other grant programs. Due to this, local governments may choose to use fund sources other than POS-Local for communication boards at playgrounds. **The department feels it may be better to authorize the use of funding for this purpose rather than requiring it; provide options rather than mandates.**

For any additional information, please feel free to contact our Legislative and Constituent Services Director, Bunky Luffman.