



## **POSITION STATEMENT**

### **INFORMATIONAL**

**Bill:** HB 0420 State and Local Parks – Play Area Accessibility – Communication Boards

**Position:** Informational

**Date:** February 14, 2024

**Contact:** Debra Borden, General Counsel

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Dear Chair Marc Korman and Vice Chair Regina T. Boyce,

The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC or “the Commission”) offers informational written testimony on HB 0420. The Commission respectfully requests that the Environment and Transportation committee consider this information and include it in the record.

**What this Bill Does.** Requires the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and local governing bodies to construct communication boards in certain newly constructed public play areas. This bill also authorizes DNR and local governing bodies to construct communication boards when making alterations to certain existing public play areas. This bill also requires the construction of Communication Boards in play areas to be funded through DNR’s program open space.

**Background on Communications Boards.** A communication board helps those who have conditions like autism or brain injuries, individuals who are non-verbal, and people who have learning disabilities and/or developmental disabilities to communicate with others.

**Prince George’s County Department of Parks and Recreation.** Commission playgrounds come in all shapes and sizes from small neighborhood parks to imagination playgrounds. Providing communication boards can ease the difficulty of communicating with people with differing abilities and who speak different languages. Prince George’s County Parks and Recreation Department strives for the equitable delivery of accessible playgrounds. For instance, new and renovated playgrounds will replace equipment and surfacing, improve access, consider additional amenities for playgrounds, and will include communication boards as part of the design process. The Department has recently installed three communication boards and plans on installing 10 a year as playgrounds are renovated/replaced.

For more information on imagination playgrounds in Prince George’s County visit our website: <https://www.pgpc.com/parks-trails/park-finder?amenity=play-equipment&renttype=>

**Montgomery County Parks.** In Montgomery County, 41.7% of the population are speakers of a non-English language, which is higher than the national average (21.9%). Montgomery Parks has installed 3’x 5’ foot framed communication boards displaying over 60 photos, symbols, and illustrations to assist people with diverse language skills to express themselves. The words or phrases are in English, Spanish, and Braille. The user simply gestures to the images on the board to communicate with others. Picture communication boards have pictures on them that link to the language we use daily. These boards have words in English, Spanish, and Braille. You can use the board to create simple messages. You can point to a picture to say that word e.g. “Happy” or point to 2 or more pictures to say a simple phrase or sentence e.g. “Hungry + I + want + snack” or “I + want + slide”.

Currently, Montgomery Parks has communication boards in eight playgrounds and an additional five in planning/production. Montgomery Parks will continue to add communication boards to new and redeveloped parks, depending on cost, site considerations, and other factors.

For more information on our communications boards in Montgomery County visit our website: <https://www.mncppc.org/5139/Playground-Renovations-Replacements>