

Department of Legislative Services  
Maryland General Assembly  
2024 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE  
Third Reader - Revised

House Bill 420

(Delegate Lehman, *et al.*)

Environment and Transportation

Education, Energy, and the Environment

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State and Local Parks - Play Area Accessibility - Recreation Communication  
Boards Pilot Program

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This bill establishes a Maryland Recreation Communication Boards Pilot Program, administered by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), to provide funding for the purchase and installation of “communication boards” in play areas in State and local parks, prioritizing newly constructed play areas. DNR may use up to \$100,000 from the Park System Capital Improvements and Acquisition Fund to fund the program. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2024, and terminates June 30, 2028.**

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Fiscal Summary

**State Effect:** The bill is not expected to have a net effect on overall State finances, as discussed below.

**Local Effect:** Local revenues and expenditures may increase, primarily due to the receipt and spending of grants under the pilot program, as discussed below.

**Small Business Effect:** Potential meaningful.

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Analysis

**Bill Summary:**

*Maryland Recreation Communication Boards Pilot Program*

The bill establishes the Maryland Recreation Communication Boards Pilot Program to improve play area accessibility by covering the costs of purchasing and installing communication boards at State and local parks, subject to the availability of funding.

“Communication board” means a device that displays photos, symbols, or illustrations with words and braille to supplement or replace spoken language as a means of expression and communication.

Local governing bodies are authorized to apply to DNR for a grant from the pilot program and DNR must prioritize the award of grants to a local governing body that is installing a communication board in a newly constructed play area. A grant award must equal the cost of purchasing and installing each communication board, up to a maximum of \$3,000 for each communication board.

“Local governing body” means the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) and the governing body of any county or Baltimore City.

#### *Required/Authorized Construction of Communication Boards*

DNR must construct a communication board in each newly constructed play area within a public park or recreation area under its jurisdiction, subject to the availability of funding under the pilot program, and each local governing body responsible for the construction of play areas (in public parks or recreation areas under its jurisdiction) that receives a grant from the pilot program must construct at least one communication board in each newly constructed play area under its jurisdiction.

In addition, DNR and each local governing body responsible for the construction of play areas within a public park or recreation area may construct a communication board in an existing play area under its jurisdiction when making alterations to that play area.

#### *Pilot Program Funding*

The bill (1) alters the purpose of the Park System Capital Improvements and Acquisition Fund so that it includes providing funding for the pilot program and (2) allows for the fund to be used to cover the costs of purchasing and installing a communication board under the pilot program. The bill also specifically authorizes the use of up to \$100,000 of a specified portion of the fund (see Current Law) for the pilot program.

#### *Reporting*

By July 1, 2025, and July 1, 2026, DNR must submit an interim report to the General Assembly that provides an evaluation of the pilot program. By July 1, 2027, DNR must submit a final report to the General Assembly on the pilot program, including a recommendation on whether it should be continued.

**Current Law:** Chapter 39 of 2022 (the Great Maryland Outdoors Act) established the Park System Capital Improvements and Acquisition Fund to provide funding for (1) completing State park projects related to capital improvements on lands managed by DNR for public purposes and (2) acquiring land to be managed by DNR for public purposes as a State park. Chapter 39 authorized a transfer of Program Open Space funding to the fund and required a general fund appropriation to the fund, which collectively total \$80.0 million. (DNR indicates that the fund received the authorized transfer and required appropriation, totaling \$80.0 million, in fiscal 2023 and 2024, respectively.)

Statute specifies uses for the first \$70.0 million in the fund, and if the fund receives more than \$70.0 million, DNR may use up to \$10.0 million for any of the purposes specified for the first \$70 million, including (1) land activation; (2) new structures; and (3) any capital improvements necessary to make State parks accessible to people with disabilities, including providing adult changing tables. (The bill authorizes the use of up to \$100,000, of the up to \$10.0 million mentioned above, for the pilot program.)

**State Fiscal Effect:** The bill is not expected to have a net effect on overall State finances, assuming the pilot program is funded only through the authorized allocation to the program of up to \$100,000 from the Park System Capital Improvements and Acquisition Fund. The allocation of funding from the Park System Capital Improvements and Acquisition Fund to the pilot program diverts funding from other authorized uses. It is assumed that (1) these funds are otherwise spent on the fund's existing authorized uses, in the absence of the bill, and (2) the allocation of funding to the pilot program does not significantly affect the timing of the spending of that funding.

DNR can administer the pilot program and comply with the reporting requirements using existing resources.

**Local Fiscal Effect:** Local revenues and expenditures may increase to the extent local governing bodies (M-NCPPC, counties, and Baltimore City) receive (and spend) grant funding under the program. Local governing bodies receive some portion of the up to \$100,000 of funding over the course of the pilot program (fiscal 2025 through 2028). Local expenditures may further increase during that time period to the extent the grants (limited to \$3,000 each) do not cover the full purchase and installation costs of any communication boards constructed by local governing bodies.

At least some local jurisdictions expect to install communication boards as part of play area construction or improvement, even in the absence of the bill, using other sources of funding. In those jurisdictions, (1) any local expenditures for costs of a communication board above the \$3,000 pilot program grant limit may occur even in the absence of the bill and (2) the pilot program grant funding may take the place of funding that otherwise is

used to install the communication boards in the absence of the bill, freeing up that other funding for other uses.

This analysis assumes that, under the bill, a local governing body is only required to construct a communication board in a newly constructed play area under its jurisdiction if the local governing body receives grant funding for the communication board.

**Small Business Effect:** The bill may have a meaningful positive impact on small businesses that sell and/or install communication boards funded by the pilot program.

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### **Additional Information**

**Recent Prior Introductions:** Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

**Designated Cross File:** None.

**Information Source(s):** Anne Arundel, Baltimore, and Frederick counties; Maryland Department of Disabilities; Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission; Department of Natural Resources; Department of Legislative Services

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - February 24, 2024  
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