

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2017 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

House Bill 936 (Delegate Simonaire)
Environment and Transportation

Maryland State Parks - Foster Family Pass - Establishment

This bill requires the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to develop a Foster Family Pass, allowing foster families free admission to, and overnight camping in, State parks.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Special fund revenues decrease annually beginning in FY 2018 as a result of the issuance of foster family passes under the bill. The extent of the decrease cannot be reliably estimated but is not expected to be more than \$50,000 annually. Expenditures are not materially affected.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: Any individual who provides foster care or kinship care to a minor child in the State is eligible to receive the pass. It must be valid for a period determined by DNR, which may not be less than one year. There is no fee for the pass.

When presented by an eligible holder accompanied by a minor child receiving foster care or kinship care from the holder, the pass (1) exempts the holder and members of the holder's household from State parks admissions fees and (2) authorizes the holder and members of the holder's household to camp overnight in any State park free of charge.

DNR must coordinate with the Department of Human Resources to establish a process for verifying the eligibility of individuals who apply for the pass and must adopt regulations to implement the bill.

“Foster care” and “kinship care” are defined in accordance with their definitions under the Family Law Article. “Foster care” means continuous 24-hour care and supportive services provided for a minor child placed by a child placement agency in an approved family home. “Kinship care” means continuous 24-hour care and supportive services provided for a minor child placed by a child placement agency in the home of a relative related by blood or marriage within the fifth degree of consanguinity or affinity under the civil law rule.

Current Law/Background: As stated in DNR regulations, the State park system is administered under the jurisdiction of the Maryland Park Service to preserve and protect the best of Maryland’s natural and historic places for the enjoyment and appreciation of its citizens. State parks are managed to provide a multitude of public benefits, including the following for nature-based outdoor recreation: trails, picnicking, boating, camping, cabins, hunting, fishing, and swimming.

DNR indicates that some, but not all, State parks charge day-use entrance fees. The Maryland Park Service currently provides reduced fees and fee waivers to a variety of State park visitors, generally providing at least free day use and in some cases reduced or no fees for camping or other activities. Examples include (1) the golden age pass, available to adults, age 62 and older; (2) the youth group pass; (3) the universal disability pass, providing free lifetime entry to individuals with disabilities and one additional person who accompanies the pass holder; (4) a day-use waiver for active duty military and Maryland National Guard; (5) a day-use waiver for veterans on Veterans’ Day; (6) a half-price day-use discount for veterans; and (7) the National Park Service’s “Every Kid in a Park” program, available to fourth grade students along with up to three adults and all other children younger than age 16 in the vehicle.

State Revenues: Special fund revenues decrease annually beginning in fiscal 2018 as a result of the issuance of foster family passes under the bill. The extent of the decrease cannot be reliably estimated, but is not expected to be more than \$50,000 annually.

DNR indicates that, according to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services data, 6,045 children were served in foster care in Maryland in 2015. If 5% of the State’s foster children (302 kids), along with three family members, visit Assateague State Park with a foster family pass once during the summer, special fund revenues decrease by \$4,832. If those same kids and their families camp for two nights at a campsite at Elk Neck State Park, using a foster family pass, special fund revenues decrease by \$12,980.

State park revenues are deposited in the Forest or Park Reserve Fund and used to fund the Maryland Park Service.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Department of Natural Resources; Department of Human Resources; Department of Legislative Services

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