SENATE BILL 522

By: Senators Hettleman and Elfreth
Introduced and read first time: January 28, 2022
Assigned to: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

A BILL ENTITLED

AN ACT concerning State and Local Parks – Child Safe Zone Program – Establishment
(Equitable Access to Safe Parks Act)

FOR the purpose of establishing the Child Safe Zone Program in the Department of Natural Resources; establishing the Child Safe Zone Fund as a special, nonlapsing fund, to provide funding for capital and operating expenses associated with enhancing public safety in State and local parks; and generally relating to public safety at State and local parks.


Preamble

WHEREAS, Enhancing access to public parks improves the physical and mental health of children and families; and

WHEREAS, Children who witness violence are more likely to suffer adverse health and social impacts; and

WHEREAS, Children and families are entitled to an expectation of safety in public spaces such as parks; and

WHEREAS, It is in the interest of children, their families, and all Marylanders for the State to encourage the safe and healthy utilization of parks on a regular basis; and

EXPLANATION: CAPITALS INDICATE MATTER ADDED TO EXISTING LAW.
[Brackets] indicate matter deleted from existing law.
WHEREAS, The designation of State and local parks as Child Safe Zones will communicate to the public that parks are intended to serve as safe community gathering spaces and thereby provide safe havens for children; now, therefore,

SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND, That the Laws of Maryland read as follows:

Article – Natural Resources

Subtitle 20. Child Safe Zone Program.


(A) In this subtitle the following words have the meanings indicated.

(B) “Child Safe Zone” means a designation that communicates the expectation that an area is safe for children and their families.

(C) “Fund” means the Child Safe Zone Fund established under § 5–2003 of this subtitle.

(D) “Program” means the Child Safe Zone Program established under § 5–2002 of this subtitle.

5–2002.

(A) There is a Child Safe Zone Program in the Department.

(B) The purpose of the Program is to:

(1) Improve and enhance public safety at State and local parks through measures funded under § 5–2003 of this subtitle;

(2) Install signage in prominent areas of each State park identifying the parks as Child Safe Zones; and

(3) Facilitate collaboration with local jurisdictions to designate local parks as Child Safe Zones.

(C) A Child Safe Zone designated under this section shall include the area surrounding the park, within 50 feet of the park’s boundaries.
(D) The Department shall communicate the identification of State parks as Child Safe Zones to the public in its marketing materials.


(A) There is a Child Safe Zone Fund.

(B) The purpose of the Fund is to provide funding for capital and operating expenses associated with enhancing public safety in State and local parks.

(C) The Department shall administer the Fund.

(D) (1) The Fund is a special, nonlapsing fund that is not subject to § 7–302 of the State Finance and Procurement Article.

(2) The State Treasurer shall hold the Fund separately, and the Comptroller shall account for the Fund.

(E) The Fund consists of:

(1) Money appropriated in the State budget to the Fund; and

(2) Any other money from any other source accepted for the benefit of the Fund.

(F) (1) The Fund may be used only for:

(i) Capital and operating expenses of the Department associated with enhancing public safety in State parks; and

(ii) Grants to local governments for capital and operating expenses associated with enhancing public safety in local parks.

(2) Public safety measures eligible for funding under this section include:

(i) Infrastructure improvements that enhance public safety, such as enhanced lighting, security and surveillance cameras, landscaping, improved access, trash receptacles, and other
IMPROVEMENTS IDENTIFIED BY THE DEPARTMENT BASED ON NATIONAL INDUSTRY
BEST PRACTICES; AND

(II) INCREASED STAFFING FOR GENERAL OPERATIONS,
INCLUDING APPROPRIATE SECURITY AND LAW ENFORCEMENT PERSONNEL.

(G) (1) THE STATE TREASURER SHALL INVEST THE MONEY OF THE FUND
IN THE SAME MANNER AS OTHER STATE MONEY MAY BE INVESTED.

(2) ANY INTEREST EARNINGS OF THE FUND SHALL BE CREDITED TO
THE GENERAL FUND OF THE STATE.

(H) EXPENDITURES FROM THE FUND MAY BE MADE ONLY IN ACCORDANCE
WITH THE STATE BUDGET.

(I) MONEY EXPENDED FROM THE FUND IS SUPPLEMENTAL TO AND IS NOT
INTENDED TO TAKE THE PLACE OF FUNDING THAT OTHERWISE WOULD BE
APPROPRIATED FOR PUBLIC SAFETY MEASURES IN STATE AND LOCAL PARKS.

SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That for fiscal year 2024, the
Governor shall include in the annual budget bill an appropriation of at least $1,000,000 to
the Child Safe Zone Fund.

SECTION 3. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect
October 1, 2022.