

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2022 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

Senate Bill 522
(Senators Hettleman and Elfreth)
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

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

This bill establishes a Child Safe Zone Program in the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and a Child Safe Zone Fund administered by the department. The bill requires the Governor to include an appropriation of at least \$1.0 million to the fund in the annual budget bill for fiscal 2024.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: General fund expenditures increase by \$1.0 million in both FY 2023 and 2024 and by indeterminate amounts in future years, as discussed below. Special fund revenues and expenditures increase correspondingly. **This bill establishes a mandated appropriation for FY 2024.**

(in dollars)	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027
SF Revenue	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	-	-	-
GF Expenditure	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	-	-	-
SF Expenditure	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	-	-	-
Net Effect	(\$1,000,000)	(\$1,000,000)	(-)	(-)	(-)

Note: (-) = decrease; GF = general funds; FF = federal funds; SF = special funds; - = indeterminate increase; (-) = indeterminate decrease

Local Effect: Local government revenues and expenditures increase annually beginning in FY 2023, as discussed below.

Small Business Effect: Potential meaningful.

Analysis

Bill Summary:

Child Safe Zone Program

The purpose of the Child Safe Zone Program is to (1) improve and enhance public safety at State and local parks through measures funded by the Child Safe Zone Fund; (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. A Child Safe Zone designated under the program must include the area surrounding the park, within 50 feet of the park's boundaries. DNR must communicate the identification of State parks as Child Safe Zones to the public in its marketing materials. "Child Safe Zone" means a designation that communicates the expectation that an area is safe for children and their families.

Child Safe Zone Fund

The purpose of the Child Safe Zone Fund is to provide funding for capital and operating expenses associated with enhancing public safety in State and local parks. The fund consists of money appropriated in the State budget to the fund and any other money from any other source accepted for the benefit of the fund. It may only be used for (1) capital and operating expenses of the department associated with enhancing public safety in State parks and (2) grants to local governments for capital and operating expenses associated with enhancing public safety in local parks. Public safety measures eligible for funding include (1) infrastructure improvements that enhance public safety, such as enhanced lighting, security and surveillance cameras, landscaping, improved access, trash receptacles, and other improvements identified by DNR based on national industry best practices and (2) increased staffing for general operations, including appropriate security and law enforcement personnel.

Any interest earnings are credited to the general fund. 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.

Current Law: DNR is authorized to make rules and regulations for the maintenance of order, safety, sanitation, traffic control, or for the protection of trees and other property and the preservation of the natural beauty within the State parks and forests, State reserves, scenic preserves, parkways, historical monuments, recreational areas, and any other lands under its control. The rules and regulations must be posted in conspicuous places upon the lands and enforced by the forest and park officers.

DNR regulations include certain provisions relating to safety in State parks, including (1) a prohibition against possession of a weapon in a State park; (2) restrictions on consumption and possession of alcohol in a State park; (3) prohibitions against various types of disorderly conduct; and (4) a requirement that an individual obey a lawful or reasonable order of a park warden or law enforcement officer in connection with the enforcement of natural resources laws, regulations, or other State laws.

State Fiscal Effect: General fund expenditures are assumed to increase by \$1.0 million in each of fiscal 2023 and 2024 and by indeterminate amounts in future years, reflecting the mandated appropriation in fiscal 2024 and assuming a similar level of funding in fiscal 2023. Special fund revenues and expenditures increase correspondingly in each year, reflecting the Child Safety Zone Fund's receipt of money from the general fund and subsequent spending from the fund. It is unclear what level of continued funding may be needed beyond fiscal 2024 to carry out the program.

DNR expects to add a full-time position, beginning in fiscal 2023, to serve as the coordinator of the program and administer grants to local governments, and presumably additional full-time or contractual positions may be funded under the program, beginning in fiscal 2023 and/or future fiscal years.

Local Fiscal Effect: Local government revenues and expenditures increase annually, beginning in fiscal 2023, due to grants received under the program and spending of those funds for capital and operating expenses associated with enhancing public safety in local parks.

Small Business Effect: Small businesses may meaningfully benefit from the bill to the extent they provide products or services for public safety enhancements under the program.

Additional Comments: The bill appears to create some level of expectation for increased public safety within a Child Safety Zone. This analysis does not reflect any potential impacts on the State or local governments related to any increase in liability that may result.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Designated Cross File: HB 788 (Delegate Stein) - Environment and Transportation.

Information Source(s): Department of Natural Resources; Department of Budget and Management; Department of State Police; Harford and Montgomery counties; Department of Legislative Services

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