



MARYLAND PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYEES COUNCIL

AFT, AFL-CIO Local 6197

A union of professionals
in service to the people
of Maryland.

**Written Testimony to the
Budget and Taxation and Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
SB 541 – Natural Resources – Maryland Park Service and State Parks – Alterations
(Great Maryland Outdoors Act)**

SUPPORT

Chair and members of the committee. On behalf of the Maryland Professional Employees Council, AFT- Local 6197, representing over 5,000 professional employees for the state of Maryland, we ask for a favorable report on SB 541- Natural Resource-Maryland Park Service and State Parks – Alterations (Great Maryland Outdoors Act)

The pandemic reminds us of the importance of better using our resources. With record-breaking numbers of over 21.5 million park visitors last year, Maryland parks proved to be not only one of the State's most valuable resources but an inclusive resource worthy of the investment this bill seeks. At the height of the pandemic, parks served as a refuge and a holistic antidote for Maryland. They remain vital to the State's recovery as they contribute to citizens' overall health and well-being and provide opportunities to enrich the quality of life for people of all demographics.

Using the resources our parks provide will require adequate staffing of park rangers. Currently, our parks operate with minimal staff, which places a strain on park rangers. Park rangers manage traffic control, keep the parks clean and safe, and respond to park emergencies. The State must offer competitive compensation packages and properly recognize their skills and service to recruit and retain quality rangers.

Park Rangers are trained in emergency services and perform the duties of first responders. This bill requires the State to certify park rangers as emergency medical responders and sets forth the necessary salary and benefits components. For these reasons, we urge you to move favorably on SB 541.

Jerry Smith
President

