



Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council

CREATING CHANGE • IMPROVING LIVES

Senate Budget and Taxation and Education, Health, and Environment Affairs Committees

SB 541: Natural Resources - Maryland Park Service and State Parks - Alterations

(Great Maryland Outdoors Act)

February 16, 2022

Letter of Information

The Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council (DD Council) is an independent, public policy organization that creates changes to make it possible for people with developmental disabilities to live the lives they want with the support they need. The DD Council is led by people with developmental disabilities and their families. As such, one of their priorities is to advocate for and fund inclusive recreation programs and activities that are fully accessible. This bill has the potential to do just that.

This bill seeks to address important structural and accessibility needs within all of Maryland's state parks by providing additional funding and requiring the development of long-term strategic goals to meet those needs. The DD Council appreciated the opportunity to provide information regarding the accessibility of our state parks to people with disabilities during a meeting of the State Park Investment Commission last year.

A record number of Marylanders have visited state parks over the last two years, and this dramatic increase has highlighted some of the much needed upgrades to ensure that all Marylanders can visit and enjoy our parks. 10.7% of all Marylanders and 22.47% of Marylanders 18 and older are people with disabilities, yet access to our state parks remains an issue to most of them. A lack of public transportation options that service state parks is a major barrier to access for people with disabilities. The majority of parks in Maryland also lack accessible restrooms, playgrounds for children, accessible picnic areas, paved trails, and adaptive recreational equipment.

In fact, of Maryland's 66 state parks, only:

- 33 have accessible playgrounds for children
- 25 have accessible picnic areas/pavilions
- 8 have adaptive recreational equipment
- 4 have paved, accessible trails
- 2 have accessible bathrooms

The Council is encouraged by the inclusion of the requirement that all future designs and considerations of amenities utilize universal principles to ensure maximum access for all Marylanders as we reimagine the experience of visiting our treasured state parks. Last year's legislative requirement that all new or renovated public buildings must include a changing facility for personal care needs of adults was an example of a step in the right direction to making our public parks inclusive and accessible for people with disabilities.

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