

SB541.ShoreRivers.Support.pdf

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Position: FAV



Testimony in SUPPORT of SB541– The Great Maryland Outdoors Act

February 16, 2022

Dear Chairman Guzzone and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in **SUPPORT** of **SB541** on behalf of ShoreRivers. ShoreRivers is a river protection group on Maryland’s Eastern Shore with over 2000 members. Our mission is to protect and restore our Eastern Shore waterways through science-based advocacy, restoration, and education.

Maryland’s Eastern Shore is defined by its “open space” and rural character, but how many of these open spaces are meant for the general public? Equitable public access to the natural resources of our state is critical for a person’s mental and physical health, and promotes a natural sense of stewardship; you will not protect what you do not love, and you cannot love what you do not know.

The Great Maryland Outdoors Act will increase the infrastructure funding available to public parks, and prioritize connectivity to local communities in an equitable manner so that there are more public spaces available for all Marylanders to enjoy. Key actions of this SB541 include: Establish a Parks and Recreation Commission to address capacity and accessibility of existing parks; establish a Sustainable Forestry Council for the State; create 100 new green jobs within the parks service, establish a new non lapsing fund for park related capital improvements and land acquisition; and bolster funding for the Maryland Rural Legacy Program and the Maryland Agriculture Land Preservation Fund.

As Chester Riverkeeper, I work with counties and towns within my watershed to improve and expand public open spaces for all communities. Parks have the ability to connect more residents with our waterways, as well as provide opportunities for reforestation or increased tree canopy, both of which are valuable green infrastructure practices that improve water quality. Increased funding and staff resources for park maintenance, capacity, infrastructure, connectivity, and equity will help organizations like ShoreRivers achieve local public access goals, connect residents to nature, and foster community stewardship to improve water quality on the Eastern Shore.

For these reasons stated above, ShoreRivers urges the Committee to adopt a **FAVORABLE** report on **SB541**.

Sincerely,

Annie Richards

Chester Riverkeeper, on behalf of:

ShoreRivers

Isabel Hardesty, Executive Director

Annie Richards, Chester Riverkeeper | Matt Pluta, Choptank Riverkeeper

Elle Bassett, Miles-Wye Riverkeeper | Zack Kelleher, Sassafras Riverkeeper

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shorerivers.org

MTC Support SB541 (1).pdf

Uploaded by: Ari Plaut

Position: FAV



February 15, 2022

Chair Guzzone and Members of the
Budget & Taxation
Senate Office Building, 3 West
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SB541-SUPPORT

Dear Chair Guzzone and Members of the Budget & Taxation Committee,

The Maryland Tourism Coalition is in support of SB541 with amendments, which addresses infrastructure, capacity, and accessibility needs within the Maryland Park Service and State parks.

The Maryland Tourism Coalition is the statewide trade association that represents the all sectors of the tourism industry. We connect, educate and advocate on behalf of our members. During the pandemic, Maryland residents and visitors flocked to our State Parks that already had a backlog of items that needed to be addressed to help keep the parks maintained to their best. The abundance of visitors just put more wear and tear on the Park System. Many of the Parks were closed, not because they were at full capacity, but because the parking lots were full, turning many visitors away who drove for hours to get to the destination. We hope they visited another local spot, rather than just turning the car around and going home. MTC hopes through the Great Maryland Outdoors Act that either parking lots can be expanded or provide a shuttle system for a local town to transport the park visitors rather than turning them away. In return, we hope these transported visitors enjoy lunch at a local restaurant, shop at a small business and maybe even make it an overnight and stay at local accommodations.

We do realize that the funding needs to come from somewhere in order to keep this program running. With that, we would like to see a percentage of park entry fees to go into the program to help pay for the maintenance, infrastructure, capacity, and accessibility needs at the state parks.

The Maryland Tourism Coalition asks to please give SB541 a favorable report with amendments.

Thank you in advance and if you have any question, please feel free to contact me directly at 336-254-4648 or ruth@mdtourism.org

Sincerely,

Ruth Toomey

Ruth Toomey

Executive Director, Maryland Tourism Coalition

GMOA Written Testimony Final.pdf

Uploaded by: Dean Hughes

Position: FAV



MARYLAND RANGERS ASSOCIATION

Testimony in Support of:

SB541 / HB727 – Maryland Park Service and State Parks – Alterations - The Great Maryland Outdoors Act

Dear Chairman Guzzone, Chairman Pinsky, members of the Budget and Taxation Committee, members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee,

From the Allegany Mountains overlooking Deep Creek Lake State Park, to the waters of the Atlantic Ocean coming ashore at Assateague State Park, Maryland offers 75 of the most geographically diverse, naturally beautiful, and historically significant parks in the United States. These mystical settings, wisely preserved and protected decades ago so that they could continue to be treasured today, are now visited more than 20 million times annually. This serves as undisputable evidence of, and demands that we take note of, the priority that Marylanders place on their State Parks, and the role they serve in enhancing the quality of their lives. While this validation is gratifying, Marylanders are collectively loving their parks to death, stressing the existing park system and aging critical infrastructure, and compromising the very essence of our mission to forever preserve these natural wonders.

On August 6, 2021, Senate President Bill Ferguson and Speaker Adrienne A. Jones announced the creation of a legislative commission to study the needs of, and make consequential recommendations for, Maryland's State Park system. Maryland's dedicated State Park Rangers were humbled to be given the opportunity to participate in this once-in-a-generation initiative, providing their first-hand professional observations of the pressing needs of the parks in their care, as well as suggestions for potential solutions to enhance our ability to effectively pursue public safety, resource protection, and outdoor recreation equity goals.

On the pages that follow, you will find the written testimony that the Maryland Rangers Association submitted to the State Park Investment Commission, which included action items intended to address what Rangers view as some of the most significant challenges. The Great Maryland Outdoors Act is seen by those Rangers as the catalyst that will alter the trajectory of our State Park system, making long-overdue investments in funding, maintenance, staffing, and land acquisition, and ushering in a new era in our State Park system's history, one which future generations will look back on with admiration and gratitude for visionary leadership and bold action. On behalf of Maryland's Rangers, Maryland's State Parks, and every Marylander, we urge a Favorable Report on this comprehensive recreation and conservation effort so that you and your loved ones, and millions of Maryland families, may forever enjoy the precious natural, cultural, historical, and recreational opportunities inherently available in our State.

Sincerely,

Ranger Dean Hughes

Ranger Dean Hughes
President
Maryland Rangers Association
mdranger2020@gmail.com



Record Visitation / Overcrowding –The number of visitors to State Parks has doubled since 2013 and repeatedly set new attendance records, including a 45% increase from 2019 to 2020, and continued increases to-date in 2021.

*Excessive demand at State Parks leads to frequent closures of many developed day-use parks, **primarily those with water access**, and results in increased pressure on surrounding undeveloped areas, leading to a compromised visitor experience, significant resource degradation and impacts to neighboring communities. These outcomes run counter to one of the most important and sought-after benefits of State Parks, that being the enhancement of the health and well-being, as well as the economic prosperity, of people.*

*Developing additional park areas **with water access** would provide more recreational opportunities and reduce pressure on existing resources. However, significant additional staff resources are already needed to meet the demands of existing operations. Any enhancements of the acquisition aspect of public lands must be paired with enhancements to the staffing and operational component.*

Action Items:

*1. As addressed by the Commission, a full inventory and assessment of existing State Park units / properties should be conducted to identify those **areas which could provide water access within reasonable proximity to the more heavily populated areas of the state**, to determine their viability for further development and enhanced access if additional staff, equipment, facilities and all operational requirements are provided in order to allow for the safe public use and efficient operation of those existing units / properties.*

2. The commission should also recommend a comprehensive assessment of acquisition opportunities to create new waterfront parks in or near Baltimore, the District of Columbia, and other heavily populated areas, to serve the critical need for access to open space for swimming and fishing in locations that are easy to reach from metropolitan counties.

Staffing - The Maryland Park Service (MPS) has identified a need for additional Rangers and other personnel / resources to effectively manage ever-growing demands.

*Visitation to State Parks has doubled since the Department of Natural Resources and Department of Budget and Management collaborated on a **five-year Strategic Plan** which was **submitted to the General Assembly in 2013**, identifying an **additional 70 positions** needed for the operation and management of the then-66 state parks. In the eight years since the Strategic Plan was submitted, **25 new State Parks and areas have been acquired / opened, yet only 13 permanent positions have been added.***

In order to meet its mission in a rapidly urbanizing state, the MPS strategically acquires new acreage and parkland as it becomes available, but is rarely successful in adding positions, budgets, vehicles and equipment, and other resources to manage the acquisition. The MPS needs adequately funded New Facility Requests to be viewed favorably, and acted upon, by DBM.



Action Items:

1. The MRA submits to the Commission that the **minimum threshold for supplemental staff is the 70 positions** recommended by the 2013 Strategic Plan, and will further submit that the significant increase in visitation since 2013, the addition of additional operational units / areas since 2013, as well as the proposed future acquisition of additional properties, require the **addition of approximately 150-200 classified positions** (managerial, operational, maintenance, administrative, naturalist, historian and planning personnel).
2. The MRA will further stress that every additional staff position must be accompanied by a **supplemental budget allocation that will adequately support the work of that specific employee**, i.e. the vehicles, equipment, offices, shops and all fiscal resources necessary to support the effective functioning of those staff.
3. The Commission should identify or develop a **formal, perpetual and sustainable funding mechanism** to accompany and support every new acquisition which involves a new operational unit of the State Park system, with the necessary staff (managerial, operational, maintenance, administrative, naturalists, historians and planning personnel), as well as vehicles, equipment, offices, shops and all fiscal resources necessary to support the effective functioning of those staff.

Human Resources – Seasonal and Classified employee recruitment and hiring processes are excessively rigid and protracted.

State Parks rely on a **very robust surge of short-term seasonal employees** to operate visitor centers, contact stations, beaches and campgrounds, as well as to perform grounds maintenance and other mission-critical functions during the busiest times of the year. **The inability to adequately staff any State Park function compromises public safety, resource protection and the visitor experience.**

The **timeline to hire a seasonal employee is approximately two months**, in many cases including rehires for vacancies occurring in the middle of the three-month summer season. **Classified vacancies are sometimes carried for up to a year or more**, for critical operational functions at parks already deemed in need of additional staff.

Action Items:

1. Given the unique nature of hiring 800 seasonal employees, and replacing those employees, as necessary, in an expeditious fashion, the MPS should be provided with an administrative **waiver to the current JobAps hiring process**, which is not well-adapted to the timely initial hire and/or replacement hiring of temporary employees during a condensed period of high demand for critical operational staff, i.e. the busy summer season in State Parks.
2. Given the officially designated and recognized essential nature and status of 100% of MPS operational staff, an **expedited process to backfill classified vacancies** is needed, e.g. the **elimination of the requirement to request Hiring Freeze Exemptions (HFEs) for all critical operational positions.**



Budget / Funding – *Despite ever-increasing attendance and associated demands, statutorily dedicated MPS funding sources are often redirected to balance the statewide or DNR budget, or for other purposes. Repayments of mandated funding are often delayed and, if and when made, are earmarked with restrictions.*

Action Items:

1. *The General Assembly should take the action necessary to mandate the **immediate and full repayment of all Program Open Space funds** previously redirected / deferred.*
2. *The General Assembly and appropriate Executive Departments should collaborate to identify a permanent, sustainable dedicated funding source that can adequately fund the additional resources identified and recommended by the Commission. **This funding source should not redirect / reallocate existing funding sources, e.g. POS funding, from local or county parks and recreation agencies**, as these partners perform a critical role in addressing the surplus demand for outdoor recreational opportunities. This mandatory funding is seen as the “**Glendening Commission**” counterpart to the **Kirwan Commission**, and could do for State Parks what that Commission did for the state’s educational system (for a fraction of the cost).*

\$68 Million Critical Maintenance Backlog – *Many State Parks were developed in the 1930s through the 1960s, and, in many cases, critical infrastructure is original and far beyond its life expectancy.*

Recurring delays and deferrals of capital project and critical maintenance funding, at a time when park attendance is at historically record high levels, results in straining and overwhelming infrastructure, leading to facility breakdowns, compromised visitor experiences, loss of services, and impacts to public safety.

*This backlog also represents the Department’s inability to meet its responsibilities with regard to **preserving and restoring the significant number of historical / cultural resources** in its care, as well as the inability to move forward with **integrating green technology** into the State Park infrastructure and **modeling sustainable practices** for both the public and private entities.*

DNR’s Engineering and Construction Unit is impeded by critical staffing shortages and unable to manage additional projects / funds with existing personnel.

Action Item:

1. *The General Assembly and appropriate Executive Departments should collaborate to utilize current and anticipated federal funding to eliminate the existing critical maintenance backlog over the next several years. In order to accomplish this, and to avoid future backlogs created, in part, by inadequate staff to manage these projects, the DNR’s Engineering and Construction unit should be provided with supplemental permanent classified staff. The General Assembly should take the action necessary to mandate the **immediate and full repayment of all Program Open Space funds** previously redirected / deferred.*
2. *The critical maintenance program must include a robust funding allocation dedicated to the **preservation and restoration of historical / cultural resources** in the care of the Department, to ensure the integrity and permanent viability of those resources, and to better **enable the interpretation of difficult histories** of many of those places and sites, stories which have been historically underrepresented.*



3. The capital and critical maintenance programs should include funding sufficient to allow the Department to modernize and integrate **green technology and sustainable practices** into all State Park facilities, whether through rehabilitation or replacement.

Employee Compensation - Numerous compensation actions over the past three years, while well-intentioned and appreciated, have resulted in unintended consequences and created significant inequities in the MPS Classification and Salary plan and resulted in salary compaction issues for many MPS employees, particularly managers.

In 2018, a Salary Equity Adjustment, requested by the MPS and approved by DBM, brought all Rangers, both current and new hires, to a Step 3 pay increment level without a commensurate increase to employees already at Step 3 or higher, **effectively resulting in the elimination of longevity pay for more senior employees.**

In 2019, a DBM-approved and union-negotiated action resulted in all Lead Rangers (Park Services Associate Leads – Grade 15) **being elevated to the same grade as their direct supervisors** (Park Services Supervisors – Grade 16). DBM later created a second Lead Ranger classification at a lower pay grade (15), **resulting in two different pay grades for the same position.**

In 2021, the minimum wage for all state employees, including short-term seasonal employees, increased to \$15/hour, **further compressing the MPS salary scale** with regard to long-term contractual and career classified employees.

All of the above actions were accomplished in the spirit of raising the level of **compensation** for the professional employees of the Maryland Park Service and bringing it more **in line with the industry standard for professional park operations and maintenance work.** However, these efforts have still fallen short of the level needed to **retain the highest quality and most diverse candidates**, and many are leaving to pursue equally meaningful work with agencies able to provide the type of compensation sought by people supporting a family while also pursuing their passion.

Action Items:

1. DBM, unilaterally or by legislative mandate, **must resolve the pay disparity related to their error**, when the state collectively bargained with the Maryland Professional Employees Council (MPEC) to implement the Annual Salary Review (ASR) submitted by DNR to provide a one-grade salary adjustment for certain employees, at which time DBM subsequently created two pay grades for the same Lead Ranger classification, one of which was also equivalent to the pay grade for supervisory employees. The requested resolution, in order to avoid rescinding any benefit provided in error to certain employees, is to **apply the same one-grade salary adjustment to the remainder of the classifications utilized by the MPS**, in order to restore the integrity of the salary scale within the unit.

2. DBM should conduct a **comprehensive analysis of comparable professional park positions** in the National Park Service, comparable state park systems, and local park systems (e.g. counties and the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission) to determine the **appropriate compensation and benefit packages required to attract and retain a qualified, diverse MPS workforce.**



3. Commensurate with a previous Salary Equity Adjustment provided to certain MPS employees, which adjusted all salaries in certain classifications to a minimum of Step 3, **all MPS employee salaries should be adjusted** in a corresponding fashion to recognize seniority, as reflected in the longevity Step increments for non-included employees relative to those employees who benefited from the Salary Equity Adjustment.

Public Safety / Law Enforcement – Due to staffing limitations and competing demands imposed upon the Natural Resources Police (conservation vs. boating vs. public lands), providing a consistent law enforcement presence in State Parks presents challenges for both the NRP and the MPS, especially as those competing demands often occur simultaneously during certain times of the year.

Given the reliance on effective enforcement, and a consistent public safety presence employing a preventive deterrent-based strategy, to ensure safe and reliable park operations and the successful implementation of management policies (rules), the park management function must be closely and directly integrated with the law enforcement function. In order to effectively manage their parks and meet statutory and ethical obligations for visitor and public safety, **it is imperative that park managers be involved in the management and allocation of law enforcement resources.**

Action Item:

The Commission should recommend and formally request an **assessment of the current ability of the Natural Resources Police to provide law enforcement services in State Parks**, and to determine whether adequate resources are being allocated to the Natural Resources Police to allow them to effectively accomplish the dual and distinctly separate missions (conservation enforcement and park enforcement) merged as a result of the law enforcement consolidation implemented in 2005, or whether one or both of those competing elements of the current NRP mission is being compromised, e.g. the inability to provide a dedicated proactive, consistent public safety presence in State Parks vs. a reactive, response-based approach.

Status as First Responders for Rangers – Despite being certified in multiple emergency response disciplines and routinely responding to a wide range of emergencies in State Parks, Rangers are struggling to receive acknowledgment of their critical role and status as first responders in the context of the state’s emergency response apparatus.

Rangers routinely respond to a variety of emergencies in State Parks and other areas, in coordination with **police, fire, and EMS, who regularly rely on Rangers** to provide first aid, search and rescue, and other public safety services in undeveloped and often remote settings.

Rangers are often overlooked for various benefits afforded to more commonly-recognized first responders like police, fire, and EMS.

Action Item:

The Commission should recommend, and the Commissioners should sponsor, **legislation to provide statutory recognition of the status of Maryland Rangers as First Responders**, and amend existing statutes to **codify the inclusion of Maryland Rangers with regard to unique benefits afforded all other First Responders** including, but not limited to, emergency response pay, preferential income tax deductions, and legal presumptions for occupational diseases.

SB541 Testimony_FAV_Preservation Maryland.pdf

Uploaded by: Eleanor Cowan

Position: FAV

Testimony of Elly Cowan

Director of Government Relations, Preservation Maryland

Before the
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
February 16, 2022

Pertaining To: SB541 - Great Maryland Outdoors Act
Support

On behalf of the staff and Board of Directors of Preservation Maryland and our thousands of statewide supporters, we greatly appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on the future of Maryland's state parks and the critical role they play in preserving our state's diverse history.

SUPPORT FOR SENATE BILL 541, GREAT MARYLAND OUTDOORS ACT

In late 2021, the Maryland General Assembly convened the State Park Investment Commission to explore the challenges associated with the operation, maintenance, staffing and access to Maryland's State Park system – and to identify next steps for improving the parks. The bill before you today is the result of the hard work of that Commission.

Over our 90-year history, Preservation Maryland has had a long-term interest in *preserving, restoring, and expanding* our state parks and protected lands. As such, we are proud to offer our enthusiastic support for SB541 which represents the greatest investment in our State Parks in a generation. This sweeping legislation creates and funds a pathway for a State Park system that addresses needs for acquisition, accessibility, and equity. It seeks to invest in the parks we already have while looking to expand the portfolio to ensure all Marylanders have public access to open space. Preservation Maryland is supportive of the many laudable goals that would be achieved through SB541 but will focus our testimony on the investment in the preservation and maintenance of the vast number of historic and cultural resources in Maryland parks and the expansion to include the diverse histories of underrepresented communities.

Maintain, Expand & Invest in Existing Resources

As the statewide, nonprofit preservation organization, Preservation Maryland is particularly interested in this issue as the Maryland Park Service (MPS) system and the broader Maryland Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) *protect more historic structures and resources than any other entity in the state* – making their success critical to our mission. Additionally, according to a study previously conducted by MDNR, visiting historic resources was the number one interest of visitors to Maryland state parks – tied only with walking. Well-preserved historic places are not just important to preservationists – they are a priority experience for Marylanders.

According to mobility data collected by Google ([google.com/covid19/mobility](https://www.google.com/covid19/mobility)), visitation to parks in Maryland is currently up more than **134%** against the pre-pandemic baseline. For popular state parks with limited access, constricted public spaces, and few park rangers, this has meant parks turning away guests during many peak visitation weekends. From the Eastern Shore to the foothills of western Maryland, the same story is repeated often.

At the same time, this influx of visitors has left a significant impact on the park resources themselves – from roads to historic sites to pools – park infrastructure requires strategic and significant investment.

The increased visitation, increased federal support, and a desire to preserve diverse history presents a unique opportunity to invest in our state parks – and help address systemic challenges faced by the system. Preservation Maryland believes that the Maryland Great Outdoors Act does just that.

To address the critical maintenance backlog throughout the Parks system, SB541 requires the Department of Natural Resources to conduct a systemwide survey of historical and cultural resources and include an estimation of the restoration costs, and the legislation provides funding to address those needs, including additional staff to be hired to increase the Park Service's capacity to administer and accomplish this monumental undertaking. Simply put, we cannot maintain or preserve what we don't know is there. This is a critical step towards addressing the preservation needs of the many invaluable historic resources in parks across the state.

Strategically Grow Park Units and Prioritize Accessibility and Inclusion

SB541 would ensure that the state prioritizes the acquisition and development of more accessible state parks to meet a growing population eager to escape to nature and learn about the state's rich history. This includes ensuring decisions related to the location and establishment of new state parks or amenities targets areas identified by the Department of Natural Resources' Park Equity tool as in need of recreational opportunities or would relieve overcrowding in existing parks that have consistently had to close due to capacity restrictions. Additionally, special attention is to be paid to the establishment of state historical parks that preserve or interpret historically underrepresented communities and that speak to the *full story* of Maryland. To that end, SB541 would establish the Freedman's State Historical Park, a park that will preserve and interpret the lives and experiences of Black Marylanders, both before and after the abolition of slavery.

Maryland has an opportunity to make a once in a lifetime investment to make our state parks more accessible and inclusive and to address the critical maintenance backlog. The Great Maryland Outdoors Act provides not only the path forward but also the much-needed funding to accomplish the vision.

Therefore, I respectfully urge a favorable report of SB541.

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Uploaded by: Elizabeth Miller

Position: FAV



February 14, 2022

SB0541 Great Maryland Outdoors Act
Beth Miller for the Green Towson Alliance
Favorable

Dear Chair Guzzone, Vice-Chair Rosapepe and Honorable Members of the Committee

The Green Towson Alliance (GTA) writes in support of SB0541 Great Maryland Outdoors Act. We are a coalition of environmental advocates who collaborate to achieve environmental goals locally, but we also concern ourselves with broader issues in Baltimore County and the state of Maryland. Baltimore County has several state parks including portions of Patapsco, Gunpowder Falls, North Point State Battlefield, Hart-Miller Island, Soldiers Delight Natural Resource Management Area and Torrey C. Brown Rail Trail. All these outdoor areas have seen substantial increases in usership over the last decade without commensurate increases in budget allocations. The spike in demands on our state parks associated with the COVID 19 pandemic highlights the role our outdoor spaces play in our physical and mental health.

This legislation aligns with our mission for best management of natural spaces. We work on both hands-on projects and educational messaging about the importance of creating trails and parks while protecting the habitat of our local flora and fauna in our backyards and public spaces. This bill has provisions for training and promoting volunteer projects such as ours. Leadership from state investment in parks will serve as a model for local jurisdictions as we advocate with them to provide an equitable distribution of green spaces and trails with rain gardens and other bioretention areas that use habitat boosting native plantings to filter and absorb stormwater.

We concur with the conclusions of the State Park Investment Commission. This legislation addresses those conclusions by increasing funding for staff, access, facility maintenance, better planning and oversight for Maryland state parks. We urge the committee to give a favorable report on SB0541.

Rest

Beth Miller
for the Green Towson Alliance

SB 541_CBF SUPPORT.pdf

Uploaded by: Erik Fisher

Position: FAV



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

*Environmental Protection and Restoration
Environmental Education*

Senate Bill 541

Natural Resources - Maryland Park Service and State Parks - Alterations
(Great Maryland Outdoors Act)

Date: February 16, 2021

Position: Support

To: Budget & Taxation Committee

From: Erik Fisher, AICP, Maryland Land Use Planner

Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **SUPPORTS** SB 541, which addresses serious funding shortfalls for supporting and preserving Maryland's parklands, farms, forests, and open space. These investments will help current and future generations of Marylanders realize a myriad of health and environmental benefits from Maryland's outdoor resources.

Parks and open space are critical to restoring the Chesapeake Bay, Maryland's natural treasure.

The forests, pastures, meadows, and marshes that stretch across the state's open spaces are our most effective natural filters, stopping pollution from fouling rivers, creeks, and the Chesapeake Bay. This natural footprint is essential to protect clean water: each acre of hardened surfaces like rooftops and parking lots is four times more polluting than meadow, and ten times more polluting than forest. Protecting and managing natural lands with park districts and conservation easements allow these landscapes to mature into high-functioning environmental features, provide sites to install pollution-reducing best management practices, and enhance wildlife habitat. For these reasons, under the interstate Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement, Maryland has committed to help restore 235,000 acres of wetlands and protect more than 2 million acres of high-value forest and farmland by 2025. Unfortunately, the Chesapeake Bay Program reports that preservation goals for open space and working lands have not yet been achieved.

The State's natural resources promote Marylanders' health and productivity.

Access to nature directly improves a person's wellbeing. Numerous studies show that contact with the natural world reduces negative health markers, increases creativity, relieves stress, and promotes a more active lifestyle. Open space also provides the opportunity to forage, fish, and develop a nutritious local food system through regenerative agriculture. Nevertheless, the Chesapeake Bay Program reports that Maryland has fallen behind Virginia, New York, and Pennsylvania in the expansion of public access to natural areas and waterways.

SB 541 invests so that generations of Marylanders can enjoy the benefits of the state's natural spaces.

Maryland is the fifth most densely populated state in the nation, and its population continues to increase. Accordingly, state park capital assets are under tremendous strain with record numbers of visitors, while some of Maryland's best remaining natural areas fall to pressure from land development. The investments directed by SB 541 will help clarify and address the backlog of repairs, upgrades, and expansions to these

Maryland Office • Philip Merrill Environmental Center • 6 Herndon Avenue • Annapolis • Maryland • 21403
Phone (410) 268-8816 • Fax (410) 280-3513

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) is a non-profit environmental education and advocacy organization dedicated to the restoration and protection of the Chesapeake Bay. With over 300,000 members and e-subscribers, including over 109,000 in Maryland alone, CBF works to educate the public and to protect the interest of the Chesapeake and its resources.

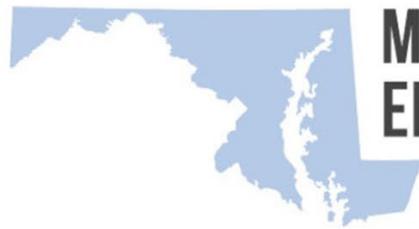
facilities in a manner that recognizes the sensitive natural features and ecological carrying capacity of each tract. This funding will also boost efforts to protect more working farms and forest land.

CBF urges the Committee's FAVORABLE report on SB 541. For more information, please contact Robin Jessica Clark, Maryland Staff Attorney at rclark@cbf.org and 443.995.8753.

Written Testimony to SB 541.pdf

Uploaded by: Felicia Hawkins

Position: FAV



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.

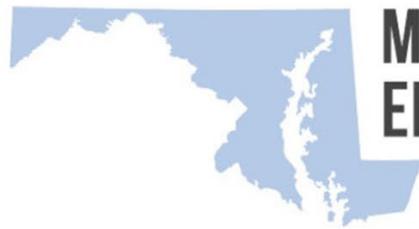
Jerry Smith
President



Written Testimony to SB 541.pdf

Uploaded by: Felicia Hawkins

Position: FAV



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
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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 Service Associates, commonly known as 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



SB 541_CWRP_Testimony_Favorable.pdf

Uploaded by: Isaac Meyer

Position: FAV

Chesapeake Watershed Restoration Professionals

Senate Bill 541
Natural Resources – Maryland Park Service and State Parks – Alterations
Great Maryland Outdoors Act

Position: FAVORABLE

February 16, 2022

Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chair, Budget and Taxation Committee

Honorable Paul Pinsky
Chair, Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Chair Guzzone, Chair Pinsky, and members of the Committees,

On behalf of the Chesapeake Watershed Restoration Professionals (CWRP), we strongly support SB 541 – Great Maryland Outdoors Act. CWRP was founded in November of 2020 and represents Maryland professionals whose daily work improves the health of Maryland’s waters and our prized Chesapeake Bay. First, we would like to commend Senator Elfreth and Delegate Luedtke for their leadership in assembling stakeholders over the last year to undertake the herculean task of identifying the sources of underinvestment in our State Parks but also presenting a vision for what the future of Maryland state parks. The final product as laid out in SB 541 will bring Maryland’s State Parks into the 21st century by clearing the critical maintenance backlog, making capital improvements, and requiring all Park Service projects to contribute to the improvement of local water quality.

CWRP would like to raise awareness of two key provisions that underscore our support for the legislation.

First, the bill establishes the Park System Capital Improvements and Acquisition Fund with a one-time \$70 million appropriation. \$5 million of the appropriation is directed to infrastructure projects that mitigate the impact of climate change including areas like stormwater infrastructure. Our members specialize in this work, and we believe this is a critical investment that we can fulfill and support its inclusion in SB 541.

Second, SB 541 requires the recognition of the role forests, trees, and wetlands play in tackling climate change and further requires all Park Service projects to contribute to the improvement of local water quality. CWRP believes this underlying theme sends an important message in recognizing the role our streams play in protecting and improving not only local water quality, but the Chesapeake Bay.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony and we urge a favorable report on SB 541.

Sincerely,

Liam O’Meara
President
Chesapeake Watershed Restoration Professionals

Written Testimony SB541 KABOOM.pdf

Uploaded by: Jen Brock-Cancellieri

Position: FAV



Position: Support SB 541

February 16, 2022

Dear Chairman Guzzone and Members of the Budget and Taxation Committee and Chair Pinsky and Members of the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee,

On behalf of KaBoom, the national nonprofit dedicated to ending playspace inequity, I support SB 541 and commend Senator Elfreth for her leadership with the State Park's Commission. As we see in our work everyday, playspaces and parks are essential to the health and well-being of kids and communities.

As the national nonprofit focused on ending playspace inequity, KABOOM! encourages all of our partners to consider how they can best make equitable investments in public parks and greenspaces. It is important to address barriers to access, such as transportation, distance, and cost, that have prevented many Black, Indigenous, and People of Color and low-income communities from having meaningful access to recreation and leisure spaces. Additionally, cultural barriers that have prevented BIPOC residents from feeling a sense of belonging in these spaces must be addressed through community outreach, participatory planning/design, and culturally responsive programming--among other solutions.

SB541 is a starting-point for facilitating these conversations and investments so we respectfully urge a favor report on SB 541 and look forward to working with Senator Elfreth and the Committee as you work to ensure Maryland's parks are resourced with a lens of equity.

Thank you,

Sally Dorman
Director of Strategic Initiatives
KaBoom
SDorman@kaboom.org
301-641-3789

Spaces to play.
Sparks for Change.

BaltimoreCounty_FAV_SB0541.pdf

Uploaded by: Joel Beller

Position: FAV



JOHN A. OLSZEWSKI, JR.
County Executive

JOEL N. BELLER
Acting Director of Government Affairs

JOSHUA M. GREENBERG
Associate Director of Government Affairs

MIA R. GOGEL
Associate Director of Government Affairs

BILL NO.: Senate Bill 541

TITLE: Natural Resources – Maryland Park Service and State Parks – Alterations (Great Maryland Outdoors Act)

SPONSOR: Senator Elfreth

COMMITTEE: Budget and Taxation

POSITION: **SUPPORT**

DATE: February 16, 2022

Baltimore County **SUPPORTS** Senate Bill 541 – Natural Resources – Maryland Park Service and State Parks – Alterations (Great Maryland Outdoors Act). This legislation would address infrastructure, capacity, and accessibility needs within the Maryland Park service and State parks.

The ability to enjoy outdoor parks and open space is a fundamental right of every Maryland resident. Baltimore County Executive John Olszewski is committed to expanding equitable access to recreational outdoor spaces as he understands the opportunities, health benefits and sense of community they provide. The County has prioritized obtaining recreational facilities and most recently announced a state-of-the-art Ravens themed facility at Northwest Regional Park. No matter their income or zip code, Maryland residents should all have easy access to clean, safe parks. In order to ensure this, it is important that the State addresses infrastructure and accessibility needs within these parks.

Senate Bill 541 ensures equal access to open spaces by increasing investments to address the needs of Maryland’s parks. This includes plans to survey infrastructure and maintenance needs, and develop capital improvement and long-range strategic goals. The legislation also provides employment opportunities for Marylanders by increasing the number of park employees. SB 541 is essential to improving the lives of all Marylanders by providing accessible parks throughout the State.

Accordingly, Baltimore County requests a **FAVORABLE** report on SB 541. For more information, please contact Joel Beller, Acting Director of Government Affairs at jbeller@baltimorecountymd.gov.

SB541_MDSierraClub_fav 16Feb2022.pdf

Uploaded by: Josh Tulkin

Position: FAV



P.O. Box 278
Riverdale, MD 20738

Committee: Budget and Taxation; Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Testimony on: SB541 “Natural Resources - Maryland Park Service and State Parks - Alterations (Great Maryland Outdoors Act)”

Position: Support

Hearing Date: February 16, 2022

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club strongly supports the Maryland Great Outdoor Act, which will provide better parks and recreation experiences for Marylanders by increasing the number of parks, park amenities, and park employees; improving transportation options to parks; creating a strategic planning process to direct increased funding; mitigating climate change through green infrastructure; and improving park equity.

Founded on high quality research provided by the State Parks Investment Commission led by former Governor Glendenning, this bill is built on science and the needs and voices of the people. The first helpful feature is an organizational upgrade that would establish a Parks and Recreation Commission to provide ongoing support and oversight of the Maryland Park Service. Effective use of state monies is promoted by the improved data collection, tracking, and evaluation of programs over time that is proposed by this legislation. The comprehensive strategic plan will help the programs to adjust over time to new challenges. Upgrades to online access to information about park availability and amenities available are also a beneficial aspect.

The bill also directly addresses overcrowding and access issues. The funding for acquisition of land for new parks in underserved areas, for more beach access, and for more historical parks will help alleviate the need for more outdoors activity options. During outings promoted by our Chapter to parks during the pandemic, members reported crowding, transportation issues, and maintenance problems. We particularly noted this in Prince George’s and Montgomery counties. The plan to survey, track, and fund park infrastructure, critical maintenance needs, and historical and cultural resources will lessen these problems. The funds to provide increased access to recreational bodies of water will increase the access to aquatic recreational areas statewide.

Another essential component of the Act is the funding of green infrastructure improvements to mitigate climate change. The strengthening of natural systems such as forest and buffer preservation, support for natural wetlands, and stormwater infrastructure such as rain gardens, permeable surfaces, and native plants will contribute to the long-term health of the parks and all of Maryland.

Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.

The bill also proposes increased agency collaboration to promote transportation options, and better public access through improved bike trails and walkability measures.

The increased availability of parks afforded by this legislation will require more park staff. This bill will increase the number of employees by 100 and improve salary equity and benefits for park employees. The improved working conditions for park employees will also enhance park experiences for visitors.

Perhaps the greatest benefit of this bill is the increased access to parks everyone will have in Maryland. The adoption of Universal Design principles will ensure people with disabilities and seniors will have more access to facilities. The use of a Park Equity Mapping Tool will help ensure that new parks are placed in areas where the population and park distribution merit them. The establishment of the Freedman's State Historical Park will share an untold part of Maryland history.

The Maryland Great Outdoors Act has a whole-system approach to improving our park system. It will bring jobs and other economic benefits across the state. Its data-driven, accountable package of improvements promises broadly shared benefits for Marylanders. The Sierra Club strongly urges a favorable report for this bill.

Lily Fountain
Natural Places Committee Chair
Lily.Fountain@MDSierra.org

Josh Tulkin
Chapter Director
Josh.Tulkin@MDSierra.org

SB541 - Natural Resources - Maryland Park Service

Uploaded by: Justin Hayes

Position: FAV



Peter Franchot
Comptroller

TESTIMONY OF COMPTROLLER PETER FRANCHOT

Support - Senate Bill 541 - Natural Resources - Maryland Park Service and State Parks - Alterations (Great Maryland Outdoors Act)

Budget and Tax Committee

February 16, 2022

Chair Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe and members of the Committee, it is my pleasure to provide testimony in **support** of **Senate Bill 541 - Natural Resources - Maryland Park Service and State Parks - Alterations (Great Maryland Outdoors Act)**. I would like to thank Senator Elfreth for sponsoring this important legislation, and the Committee for providing the opportunity for my testimony to be heard.

Since 2020 there has been a surge in demand for open space as Maryland residents look for safe recreational areas. This has served to highlight both the intrinsic value of our state's park system, and the maintenance challenges associated with increased visitation. Currently, the state has numerous projects totaling more than \$60 million backlogged due to a lack of funding. During 2020 there were nearly 300 park closures at locations across the state due to capacity limits. For too long, the needs of our parks have been unmet, and Senate Bill 541 seeks to right that wrong with a historic investment in park system capital improvements, infrastructure projects to mitigate climate change, preservation, land acquisition, staffing additions, and more.

Public parks provide a significant benefit available to all Marylanders. Senate Bill 541 would work to address many of the issues with the state park system by instituting recommendations from the State Park Investment Commission, and greatly improving both the quality and availability of park space in Maryland. For these reasons, I respectfully request a favorable report for Senate Bill 541. Thank you for your time and consideration.

###

SB 541 Great Maryland Outdoors Act -- FAVORABLE.pd

Uploaded by: KIMBERLY EGAN

Position: FAV



One Common Bond | The Horse
One Common Voice | The Maryland Horse Council

Testimony of the Maryland Horse Council on SB 541

Natural Resources - Maryland Park Service and State Parks - Alterations (Great Maryland Outdoors Act) – **FAVORABLE**

The Maryland Horse Council (MHC) is a membership-based trade association that represents the state-wide horse industry in Maryland. Our members include horse farms; horse related businesses; equestrian competitors; trainers; individual enthusiasts; equine-assisted therapy programs; and breed, interest, and discipline associations. We represent over 30,000 Marylanders who make their living with horses, or who just own and love them.

MHC supports SB 541 because most riders are recreational riders, and most recreational riders use Maryland's extensive network of multi-use trails.

The horse industry overall has a \$2.4 billion impact on Maryland. Recreational riding alone supports ~5,000 jobs and adds \$268 million in value to the State's economy. The total economic impact of recreational riding in Maryland is \$438 million in 2022 dollars.

We applaud the sponsors for so rapidly taking steps to implement the recommendations of the State Park Investment Commission. Our industry is committed to expanding equine recreational opportunities that are adequately accessible to all populations of Marylanders, including low-income Marylanders, those who lack access to a car, and Marylanders with disabilities. We also applaud Governor Hogan for creating the Office Outdoor Recreation (ORR) to enhance outdoor recreation opportunities and the economic benefits they produce.

Every component of SB 541 will benefit the horse industry, but in particular:

- The new Volunteer Management Program will solve a major challenge that has faced our recreational riders through the years. Trail riding groups are ready, willing, and eager to volunteer for trail maintenance work, but they are often unable effectively to work through the current system for getting approved as a volunteer organization. In addition, trail riding organizations have faced challenges with respect to the mandatory chainsaw training. Taken together, it has been difficult, if not impossible, for trail riders



One Common Bond | The Horse
One Common Voice | The Maryland Horse Council

to clear logs and trees that block trails after a storm, or to trim trees to a level sufficiently high to permit riders to pass without getting hit by over-hanging limbs. A coordinated volunteer program dedicated to promoting volunteer opportunities and conducting training will be an immense help.

- The \$80 million Park System Critical Maintenance Fund is essential to repair trails that have eroded, that have large holes, and that have otherwise degraded to the point of being unsafe for users.
- The \$70 million Park System Capital Improvement & Acquisitions Fund is essential to improving the carbon capture capacity of our parks through flood barriers and forest buffers, for improving and expanding multi-use trails, and for acquiring new public land to relieve overcrowding.

Thank you again for sponsoring this important and potentially game changing legislation. We urge the committee to give it a favorable report.

Respectfully submitted,

THE MARYLAND HORSE COUNCIL
(844) MDHORSE (844-634-6773)

SB541_Favorable_VAAAC.pdf

Uploaded by: Kristen Pironis

Position: FAV



February 15, 2022

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chair, Budget and Taxation Committee
3 West, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: SB541: Natural Resources – Maryland Park Service and State Parks – Alterations
(Great Maryland Outdoors Act) (Fiscal Year 2023)

Dear Senator Guzzone:

I'm Kristen Pironis, the executive director of Visit Annapolis & Anne Arundel County. I came on board in April 2021, just as we thought we were coming out of the worst of COVID. It was an exciting time in the travel and tourism industry. While the industry had suffered horrific and substantial setbacks, we knew we could re-establish the industry in Maryland and make it even better. Looking back at that sentiment now, I realize it may have been wishful thinking as the tourism industry continues to struggle. But there have been bright spots. Even during the worst of the pandemic what set Anne Arundel County and, in fact, Maryland as a whole was its vast park and recreation spaces.

The past 18 months have driven home like never before just how valued, beloved, and essential our state parks are when it comes to helping provide a sense of calm and wellbeing in an unsettled world. During the COVID-19 pandemic, visitation to Maryland's state parks skyrocketed as individuals and families sought safe forms of outdoor recreation. In 2020, Maryland's state parks welcomed 21.5 million visitors, a 45 percent increase over 2019 and the trend continued through 2021.

In 2020, 1.5 million individuals visited Sandy Point State Park in Anne Arundel County. With increased visitation to the park comes increased wear and tear on the facility and the need for more frequent maintenance and repair work. Allocating adequate funding to accomplish this task is essential to providing an enhanced visitor experience that will help grow the number of loyal customers, encourage repeat visitation, and increase visitor expenditures. With heightened visitation comes the need for additional staffing to provide adequate oversight for the state parks and the satellite parks many of them simultaneously manage.

Further, the availability of parks and open spaces is a key deciding factor for individuals making vacation plans. In recent years, Sandy Point State Park often has had turn people away because it has reached capacity early in the day—especially on weekends. Vacationers who are turned away must find other things to do and other destinations to patronize. This results in reduced tourism revenue for Annapolis and Anne Arundel County and the State of Maryland.

Overcrowding at Sandy Point State Park prompted the nonprofit organization, Chesapeake Region Accessible Boating (CRAB), to find a more suitable location for providing sailing experiences for individuals with disabilities. Because of regular and predictable early park closings on weekends, CRAB limited its hours primarily to weekdays, when its guests had a better chance of getting into the park and accessing CRAB's pier. In order to expand its hours of operation and make its services available to a larger number of disabled area residents and visitors, the organization is building an adaptive boating center with multiple piers at the former Port Williams Marina on Back Creek that's slated to open in spring 2022.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made it abundantly clear that area residents and visitors alike rely on Maryland's green spaces for safe, affordable recreational opportunities. I urge you to support Senate Bill 541 to directly address the challenges facing Sandy Point and its sister state parks when it comes to issues of accessibility, funding, staffing, and overcrowding. Maryland's state parks have always been among its greatest assets. At a time when an entire nation is seeking superior outdoor recreational opportunities, we cannot afford to let Maryland's reputation slip. With your support, Maryland's parks will be able to shine for the state's residents and for the millions of individuals who visit Maryland each year and infuse billions of dollars into our economy.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Kristen Pironis
Executive Director
Visit Annapolis & Anne Arundel County

Cc: The Honorable Sarah Elfreth

MD Catholic Conference_FAV_SB0541.pdf

Uploaded by: MJ Kraska

Position: FAV



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

February 16, 2022

SB 541

Natural Resources - Maryland Park Service and State Parks - Alterations (Great Maryland Outdoors Act)

**Senate Budget & Taxation Committee
Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs**

Position: Support

The Maryland Catholic Conference (“Conference”) represents the public-policy interests of the three Roman Catholic (arch) dioceses serving Maryland: the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the Archdiocese of Washington, and the Diocese of Wilmington.

Senate Bill 541 addresses infrastructure, capacity, and accessibility needs within the Maryland Park Service and State parks, including establishing systems and processes for surveying infrastructure and critical maintenance needs, increasing the number of Maryland Park Service full-time employees, requiring the Department of Budget and Management to conduct certain staff reviews, and requiring the Department of Natural Resources to develop a certain capital improvement plan and a comprehensive long-range strategic plan

At its core, environmental concerns are about the future of God's creation and the one human family. Such concerns are about protecting both the human environment and the natural environment. They are about stewardship of God's creation and our responsibility to those who come after us. As stewards of God's creation we can live more simply, using the earth's resources wisely, reducing our consumption, working to eliminate pollution and reducing our carbon footprint. Our church teachings regarding environmental stewardship are rich and challenging. Pope Benedict XVI, in his 2010 World Day of Peace message entitled *If you Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation*, urged us to renew and strengthen “*that covenant between human beings and the environment, which should mirror the creative love of God, from whom we come and towards whom we are journeying*” (no. 1).

The Conference appreciates your consideration and respectfully urges a favorable report for Senate Bill 541.

Anne Arundel County_FAV_SB 541.pdf

Uploaded by: Peter Baron

Position: FAV



February 16, 2022

Senate Bill 541

**Natural Resources - Maryland Park Service and
State Parks - Alterations
(Great Maryland Outdoors Act)**

Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

Position: FAVORABLE

Senate Bill 541 will make critical, forward-thinking investments in the state park system in order to increase staffing, expand recreational amenities, and improve equity of access.

Anne Arundel County shares the legislature's commitment to preserving our natural resources and supporting and enhancing outdoor recreation opportunities. This commitment has taken on new importance during the pandemic, as public use of and demand for parks and open space has increased dramatically. Our state and local parks have seen a surge of unprecedented crowds throughout the pandemic, which has put stress on park rangers and staff, historical sites, and aging infrastructure. This demand has also highlighted the need to resolve long-standing barriers to park access that some of our communities face.

With nearly 50 active capital projects in its six year plan, the County Department of Recreation and Parks continues to create public spaces that enhance our health and connect us to nature. We are creating better park access for people with disabilities, transforming the idea of a county-wide trail network from a concept to reality, and investing in water access projects. Our goal is to provide a diverse range of accessible recreational facilities and programs to serve the needs of all County residents.

This landmark legislation will preserve the irreplaceable natural, historical, and cultural sites that we all treasure. For these reasons, Anne Arundel County requests a **FAVORABLE** report on SB 541.

SB541_Elfreth_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Sarah Elfreth

Position: FAV

SENATOR SARAH ELFRETH
Legislative District 30
Anne Arundel County

Budget and Taxation Committee

Subcommittees

Education, Business and Administration

Chair, Pensions

Senate Chair

Joint Committee on Administrative,
Executive, and Legislative Review

Joint Committee on the Chesapeake and
Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area



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Sarah.Elfreth@senate.state.md.us

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 16, 2022

Testimony in Favor of SB541
Natural Resources - Maryland Park Service and State Parks - Alterations
(Great Maryland Outdoors Act)

Chairman Guzzone, Vice-Chair Rosapepe, & members of the Budget and Taxation Committee:

I respectfully request a favorable report of SB541, the Great Maryland Outdoors Act, to implement the recommendations from the [State Park Investment Commission's final report](#) and provide a once-in-a-generation investment to our State Parks and the Maryland Park Service (MPS).

In August 2021, the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House jointly appointed a commission to investigate and make recommendations regarding overcrowding in Maryland State parks, including: the adequacy of existing State Park facilities to meet the demand for recreational opportunities in the State; levels of operational funding and staff for existing State parks; the need for capital funding to provide a high-quality experience to park visitors; the need for new State park offerings and identification of any recreational deserts across Maryland; and the extent to which State parks and associated recreational opportunities are adequately accessible to all populations of Marylanders, including low-income Marylanders, those who lack access to a car, and Marylanders with disabilities.

Our Commission's work was directly connected to the record levels of visitorship experienced and record-setting capacity-related shutdowns experienced over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic; however, we also approached this challenge and work with the mindset of ensuring that each and every Marylander throughout the State have equitable access to our State Parks.

Through this process, we also learned more of the critical role that our State Parks play in our State – from the public health benefits of more outdoor recreation to the important land preservation role and environmental protections our parks provide. Furthermore, they are also an economic engine for our State with outdoor recreation opportunities generating more than \$14 billion in consumer spending yearly; 109,000 direct jobs; \$4.4 billion in wages and salaries; and, \$951 million in State and Local tax revenue in Maryland

With all of this in mind, our Commission's recommendations have taken the form of this legislation and **the Great Maryland Outdoors Act will:**

Correct decades of underfunding to our State Park System through the creation of an \$80 million dollar Park System Critical Maintenance Fund to help pay down the \$68 million dollar backlog of repairs needed on properties throughout the System. The Governor included significant funding to front-load this work in his FY23 Budget - the funding in this legislation will ensure we tackle the entirety of that backlog as well other critical maintenance projects.

Address overcrowding of State Parks through the creation of a \$70 million dollar Park System Capital Improvements and Acquisition Fund and directly earmark:

1. \$30 million for land acquisition and directing these new acquisitions to prioritize: locations in Central and Southern Maryland to relieve overcrowding and expand public access; sites with historic significance to minority communities; and waterfront/beachfront property.
2. \$20 million for transportation improvements including targeted investments to avoid capacity shutdowns, expanding parking availability, and improving trail connectivity.
3. \$10 million for increasing water access opportunities such as kayak boat launches.
4. \$5 million for historic preservation
5. \$5 million for infrastructure projects that mitigate the effects of climate change such as flood barriers and forest buffers.

Support the dedicated staff and park rangers by fixing the decades of understaffing experienced in the Park System and recognizing their service to our State by:

1. Requiring MPS and DNR to fill 100 additional positions – with at least 5 of these staff in the engineering and construction unit, 5 in the land acquisition and planning unit, and 1 volunteer program coordinator.
2. Acknowledging the role of State Park Rangers as first responders and thereby guaranteeing them the benefits and rights offered to those individuals who perform critical public services

Ensure transparency & accountability as we appropriately plan for the future of our State Park System by:

1. Requiring the development of a Capital Improvement Plan, with appropriate public input, to ensure that the needs of the Park System are prioritized and organized.
2. Developing a Comprehensive Long Term Strategic Plan to look holistically at the Park System and the establishment of new parks, historic areas, trails, and other opportunities.
3. Establishing Freedman's State Historical Park to tell the critically important story of Black Marylanders both before and after the abolition of slavery – but to also set the groundwork for future partnership parks.

Providing necessary oversight to the Maryland Park System by establishing the Parks and Recreation Commission in DNR to support the Maryland Park Service and ensure that we do not reach a critical moment like the one we are in again.

Additionally, through recent conversations with the Department of Natural Resources and input from various stakeholder groups, we are also working on a comprehensive amendment to the legislation with our House cross-file to encompass some of the suggestions we have heard, including:

1. Adding intent language to the bill that it is the General Assembly's intent to identify and fund a State Park within the Beltway in Prince George's County to create more equitable access.
2. Changing the staffing of the Parks and Recreation Commission from DLS to DNR.
3. Establishing a Great Maryland Outdoors Fund and authorizing the Governor to appropriate up to \$3 million dollars annually and authorizing the Office of Outdoor Recreation to provide grants to direct marketing organizations for the purpose of promoting and marketing State parks. Earlier today we received news that our Federal partners have secured \$15 million towards this similar effort. The amendment will make clear that these federal funds will be utilized towards this effort.
4. Authorizing counties to establish partnership parks through MOU's anywhere in the State.
5. Requiring DNR to report on the reactivation of Fort Tonoloway State Park following an archeological excavation of the site.
6. Changing the effective date of the legislation to June 1, 2022.

This legislation is the opportunity to create the "third wave" of conservation and Park expansion - with the first wave being when President Theodore Roosevelt in the early-1900s led the creation of the first National Forests, National Monuments, and National Parks; then with President Franklin Delano Roosevelt creating the Civilian Conservation Corps and expanded the National Park Service in the mid-twentieth century; and most recently through the passage of the Great American Outdoors Act in Congress just a year ago.

This is the time for us to create a nation-leading Park System and I hope we seize it. Once again I respectfully request a favorable report of SB541.

SB 541 Testimony MARBIDCO .pdf

Uploaded by: Steve McHenry

Position: FAV



MARBIDCO
growing rural ventures™

MARYLAND AGRICULTURAL AND RESOURCE-BASED
INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
1410 Forest Drive, Suite 21 ~ Annapolis, MD 21403
Office: 410-267-6807 ~ Fax: 410-267-6809
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Ms. Mary Shank Creek, *Chair* / Stephen R. McHenry, *Executive Director*

TESTIMONY STATEMENT

BILL: Senate Bill 541 (Natural Resources - Maryland Park Service and State Parks - Alterations (Great Maryland Outdoors Act))

COMMITTEE: Senate Budget and Taxation

DATE: February 16, 2022

POSITION: Support

The Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO) supports Senate Bill 541, which among several features accelerates four years of statutory funding (at \$2.5 annually) for the **Next Generation Farmland Acquisition Program** into a single distribution in FY 2024 of \$10 million. MARBIDCO appreciates the support of the important program which now has two important components (and a third one is potentially in development).

The Next Generation Farmland Acquisition Program (Next Gen Program) was established by MARBIDCO to help qualified young or beginning farmers who have trouble entering or staying in the agricultural profession because of relatively high farmland costs and a lack of access to adequate financial capital to purchase farmland. The Next Gen Program is a relatively speedy farmland conservation easement (or option) purchase program that is designed to help facilitate the transfer of farmland to a new generation of farmers, while at the same time, effectively helping to preserve the subject agricultural land from future development.

The Next Gen Program is an important tool in the financial programs toolbox that allows MARBIDCO to help young or beginning farmers who need access to good quality farmland. The Next Gen Program permits MARBIDCO to provide a young or beginning farmer with the money needed to make a large down-payment on a farm, in order to meet the equity contribution and projected cash flow requirements of a commercial lender, which then permits the lender to make a loan to help finance the balance of a farm purchase. An additional benefit of this program is that the farms that are being purchased are being put on a path to being permanently preserved.

Since the launch of the original Next Gen Program in FY 2018, MARBIDCO has received a total of \$12,231,250 in appropriations from the State of Maryland, (with \$2.5 million received annually, except in FY 2021 there was a small pandemic-related reduction of \$268,750). In FY 2023, \$2.5 million is budgeted in the Dedicated Purpose Account for the Next Gen Program (this for the first time, rather than in MDA's budget allowance).

The Next Gen Program is generally designed to provide a “beginner farmer” (see definition below*) with the money needed for a down-payment towards a farm purchase, while the subject farmland is put on a path to becoming permanently preserved. At settlement, the Next Gen farmer is awarded an “Option Purchase”, where they enter into an Option Agreement with MARBIDCO and receive an Option Purchase amount (at 51% FMV of the land) to be used as the farm purchase down-payment. (Eligible farm properties must be at least 50 acres in size, unless they are contiguous to already preserved land, then they can be smaller.)

**A Beginner Farmer is defined as one who:*

- *Does not own a farm or (or currently owns less than 20 acres of agricultural land); **and***
- *Has not operated a farm or ranch as a principal operator for more than 10 years; **and***
- *Has at least one year of farming experience or has completed a qualified farm management training program that includes substantial fieldwork experience (must be documented in an appropriate fashion); **and***
- *Expects to substantially participate in the farm operation on the subject property.*

The Option Agreement allows the Next Gen farmer a period of several years to sell the permanent easement to a rural land preservation program (such as MALPF, Rural Legacy, a county program, etc.) Typically, once the Next Gen farmer has received an offer to sell the permanent easement, MARBIDCO will terminate and release the Option and receive a repayment amount equivalent to the original Option Purchase Price amount (plus an additional 3% admin fee collected), and the Next Gen farmer is able to retain the remaining amount of money from the permanent easement sale.

In FY 2020, MARBIDCO established a variant of the original program called the **Small Acreage Next Generation Farmland Acquisition Program (SANG)** to help qualified Next Gen farmers purchase smaller farm properties - between 10 to 49 acres in size. Under the SANG program, MARBIDCO awards the SANG farmer with funds for a farm purchase down-payment via an outright “Easement Purchase”, where the applicant agrees to permanently preserve the property under a deed restricted conservation easement in exchange for these funds.

Under both versions of the program, once the permanent easement is on track to be settled, MARBIDCO assigns the easement to a “Permanent Easement Holder”, since MARBIDCO does not hold or administer permanent conservation easements. (MARBIDCO only holds temporary easements.)

Summary Next Generation Program Statistics*

- Total Projects Funded: **33** (30 Original Next Gen and 3 SANG)
- Total Farmland Acres Preserved: **3,080 acres**
- Total Dollar Amount for Easement or Option Purchases Made So Far: **\$9.0 million**

**Does not include pending project applications.*

What Does the Future Hold for the Next Gen Program?

The demand for the **original Next Gen Program** has been relatively steady averaging approximately 8 to 10 applications per year. (Not all applicants are able or willing to complete the process, and some have actually withdrawn their applications after receiving approval.) MARBIDCO expects this trend in the number of applications received to continue going forward.

The demand for the **Small Acreage Next Gen Program (SANG)** appears to be increasing as the word about the new program spreads. The volume of inquiries received in recent months has picked up steadily. MARBIDCO expects the number of SANG applications to increase over time and the demand for SANG projects could mirror that of the original Next Gen Program.

The Committee will also be interested to know that there is also a new urban farmer-focused variation of the Next Gen Program that is currently under development (for properties under 3 to 5 acres in size located in urban areas). MARBIDCO is seriously considering implementing such a program recognizing the need to help urban farmers gain long-term access to land but to also preserve the land and provide a benefit to the community. MARBIDCO has held meetings recently with three land trusts in the Baltimore metro area to see if establishing an **Urban Farmer Next Gen Program** would be feasible for launch in the near future. Farmland preservation in urban settings holds certain challenges not experienced in rural areas, particularly given the fact that urban land trusts do not hold or administer permanent conservation easements in the same manner that rural land trusts do.

MARBIDCO is exploring the feasibility of offering a program in which it would work with both qualified farmers and urban land trusts to finance the purchase of farm-appropriate parcels of land in urban areas which would be owned by the land trust and leased at little cost to Next Gen urban farmers under a long-term arrangement. Under a ground lease model, the land trust owns the land, and the farmer owns the improvements on the land. By allowing the certainty that is provided by a longer-term land lease, the farmer is incentivized to make, and is able to own the improvements, made to the property. Therefore, he or she has an equity stake in the enterprise and can recoup his or her investment in improving the land and purchasing agricultural facilities later if needed (including soil conditioning, water/irrigation, hoop houses, etc.) By having the land trust own the land (the ground only), the land trust can ensure the land is not developed and remains as a community benefit. MARBIDCO expects to reach a conclusion concerning the feasibility of this approach in the near future.

As such, MARBIDCO respectfully requests a Favorable Report for Senate Bill 541.

MARBIDCO Contact: Steve McHenry, 410.267.6807

MARBIDCO was established by the Maryland General Assembly 15 years ago to help enhance the sustainability and profitability of the State's agricultural and resource-based industries to help bolster rural economies, support locally produced food and fiber products, and preserve working farm and forest land. MARBIDCO is a nimble, quasi-public financial intermediary organization which has a mission to serve exclusively the commercial farming, forestry, and seafood industries of Maryland. Assisting young and beginning farmers are a special focus for MARBIDCO, as is farm operation diversification (through value added processing activities). Commercial urban farming has also become a focus of MARBIDCO's efforts.

In delivering its financing programs, MARBIDCO works cooperatively with commercial banks and farm credit associations, as well as a host of federal, State, regional and local government agencies, and universities. Since 2007, MARBIDCO has approved 1056 financings totaling nearly \$80 million for food and fiber business projects located in all Maryland's counties (including Baltimore City) – and in the process has leveraged more than \$170 million in commercial lender financing. For more information about MARBIDCO's programs, please visit: www.marbidco.org.

Friends of MD State Parks Testimony- Great Marylan

Uploaded by: Tim Casey

Position: FAV



Friends of Maryland State Parks Foundation

*is a statewide, independent, all-volunteer, citizen 501 (c) 3 organization.
We are dedicated to **preserve, protect, enhance, and advocate** for our state parks.*

Friends of Maryland State Parks Written Testimony Great Maryland Outdoors Act SB541 & HB727

Friends Vision for Maryland State Parks:

Since 1906 Maryland State Parks have enhanced quality of life ideals by promoting health, safety, education, environmental stewardship, physical fitness, family enjoyment, and the general welfare of the public. Our parks' natural and recreational resources and cultural heritage should be sustained now and for all succeeding generations. We believe our park system should be the best and aspire to be a "National Model"¹.

Great Maryland Outdoors Act:

The Friends fully and enthusiastically support this landmark, comprehensive, bi-partisan, cross-filed legislation. It is holistically and historically transformational for Maryland's State Parks System. The reasons the Friends strongly encourage passing SB541 & HB727 are as follow:

Strategic Positioning: Parks & Recreation Commission

This Commission provides oversight and transparency through management control of the objectives of this legislation. It requires "best practice processes" of a Park Service Comprehensive Strategic Master Plan and Independent Expertise to review and advise on the Plan's goals and measures the results expected and achieved. This is an effective and efficient closed-loop system.

Access for All: Recreation, Culture, Historic, Diversity, and Equality of Access

- Creates and expands Land Acquisition of new and existing State Parks by allocating \$60M to improve expanded Recreation, Cultural & Historic Preservation, Diversity, and Equality of Access to meet the high-quality experience all Maryland citizens statewide deserve.
- Increases the capacity to offer Water-based Recreation Opportunities to meet citizen demand.
- Ensures Design Principles to effectively accommodate persons w/ disabilities and seniors.
- Focuses on Transportation, Connectivity, and Access to and w/in State Parks in response to the growth in attendance, doubling in the last decade to 20 million visitors.
- Reduces w/ the intent to Eliminate Closures due to continued growth in visitor demand.
- Reduces Park Degradation due to Overcrowding.
- Preserves and interprets the story of Black Marylanders and for the underserved, minorities, and other underrepresented communities.
- Authorizes the establishment of a new Freedman's State Park, a needed historical preservation connection to Black Marylanders.

Current State Park System: Human & Natural Resources, Buildings & Facilities, Roads & Parking

- Increases Rangers and Park Staff by 100, which has grown by only 4.6% over the last decade.
- Increases Critical Maintenance funding by \$80M to begin reducing the backlog.
- Increases Capital Improvements funding by \$70M for long-delayed projects.

Human Resources Management: Rangers, Park Maintenance Staff

- Requires timely reviews of Organizational Staffing and Pay Equity.
- Provides Park Staff w/ Emergency Services Responder Designation for occupational benefits and protections recognized as commensurate w/ their job requirements.

¹ Reference is the 2007 Maryland State Parks Funding Study, available upon request.



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Friends of Maryland State Parks Written Testimony Great Maryland Outdoors Act SB541 & HB727

Good Organizational Systems:

- Recognizes and fosters the need for Sustainable Ecological Practices related to water quality, energy use, use of natural resources, and climate change-related resiliency.
- Recognizes and encourages Design Principles in Interpretation and Programming explaining natural and cultural resources, and enhancing equity in access.
- Implements the use of best practice Asset Management and Evaluation Systems for inventory, project management, project prioritization, and facility conditions assessments.
- Implements a strategically designed Volunteer Management System for 1000's of volunteers.

Quality of Life Benefits: State Parks improve citizens' quality of life², through increased property values, clean air and water, and offset climate change and pollution. When surveyed and polled, citizens continue to rate state parks very high in natural and historic/cultural resources, conservation, family values, and healthy lifestyle through recreation opportunities.

Economic Benefits: State parks are a major contributor to the economy³.

In 2021 it is estimated, at a minimum, state parks generated:

- \$50+ million in taxes & \$17+ million in visitor fees;
- \$25 to \$1 return on investment & \$1.3 billion in economic impact⁴;
- over 13,000 Full-Time Equivalent Jobs.

Volunteers:

5000 Volunteers and all the individual state parks Friends groups across the state have donated over 200,000 hours each year valued at over \$5.7 million⁵ and will be strategically managed.

- Skilled volunteers provide training and expertise in many highly technical areas.
- Volunteers provide diversity in the state park workforce.
- Volunteers provide unique perspectives, valuable insights, and can be some of the best advocates for parks and communities.
- Volunteer hours and numbers have long been significantly underreported due to a lack of up-to-date reporting software, and a lack of full-time volunteer and partnership coordinators in both parks and headquarters offices.

Respectfully Submitted,

Mel Poole, President, keeper1916@comcast.net

Tim Casey, Secretary, 17 Lochwynd Court Phoenix, MD 21131

443 801 6272 tjwcasey@comcast.net

Friends Website <http://friendsofmdparks.org/>

² Multiple Goucher polls since 2013, the 2016 MD State Parks Strategic Investment Plan (published in December 2016 & available upon request) and ongoing, continuous Park Service surveys.

³ 2010 Maryland State Parks Economic Impact & Visitor Study published in March 2011. Numbers are estimated for 2021 & non-pandemic inflated.

⁴ Maryland Outdoor Recreation Economic Commission Final Report December 2019. Park Service budget is .00115 of the state operating budget.

⁵ Reference is a highly conservative estimate using actual data from Jerusalem Mill, Cunningham, & Gambrills State Parks, & the non-profit IndependentSector.org & U of MD School of Public Policy for MD hourly volunteer rate of \$28.54. The calculation is available upon request.

SB541 Chesapeake-IWIF Bill.pdf

Uploaded by: Carmine D'Alessandro

Position: FWA



**Testimony of Chesapeake Employers’ Insurance Company
 and Injured Workers’ Insurance Fund: Senate Bill 541 (Favorable with
 Amendments)**

SB 541 proposes to address infrastructure, capacity, and accessibility with the Maryland Park Service and State parks. The bill also proposes to add several occupational disease presumptions under Labor and Employment, § 9-503 for park services associates, forest rangers, park rangers, and wildlife rangers. The presumptions proposed include heart disease, hypertension, lung disease, certain types of cancers (leukemia, prostate, rectal, throat, multiple myeloma, non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma, brain, testicular, bladder, kidney, renal, or breast), and Lyme disease.

Under the current presumption law, various police officers are covered by a presumption for heart disease and hypertension; various firefighters are covered by a presumption for heart disease, hypertension, lung disease, and certain types of cancers (leukemia, prostate, rectal, throat, multiple myeloma, non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma, brain, testicular, bladder, kidney, renal, or breast), and paid law enforcement employees of the Department Natural Resources have a presumption for Lyme disease.

The chart below includes all claims in the last ten years (2012 - 2021) that fit into the above current presumptions with the incurred cost and average cost per claim for Chesapeake Employers’ Insurance and the Injured Workers’ Insurance Fund.

Year	Incurred Cost	# of Claims	Average per Claim
2021	\$6,246,861.57	76	\$82,195.55
2020	\$4,824,227.72	60	\$80,403.80
2019	\$2,576,798.84	85	\$30,315.28
2018	\$1,791,827.51	86	\$20,835.20
2017	\$7,109,476.59	86	\$82,668.33
2016	\$2,426,160.45	42	\$57,765.73
2015	\$4,334,781.12	64	\$67,730.96
2014	\$2,798,433.94	70	\$39,977.63
2013	\$1,929,333.93	53	\$36,402.53
2012	\$2,146,501.25	44	\$48,784.12
Total	\$36,184,402.92	666	\$54,330.94

The Injured Workers' Insurance Fund is not aware of the number of employees the Department Natural Resources has for park services associates, forest rangers, park rangers, and wildlife rangers currently. Additionally, this bill proposes to increase the number of employees for the Department of Natural Resources. As our figures note above, under the current presumption law, Chesapeake Employers' Insurance and the Injured Workers' Insurance Fund have incurred a total of \$36,184,402.92 over 666 claims for ten years of data: a significant cost to both the State and local governments. Finally, as with other presumptions, we can expect that other employment groups will attempt to also add additional presumptions based on this employment group additions, thereby significantly increasing the fiscal impact to state and local governments.

Clearly, the focus of Senate Bill 541 is not workers' compensation. Moreover, all employees of the Department of Natural Resources are covered employees under Maryland's Workers' Compensation Act. The sole issue, therefore, is whether certain presumptions under said Act should be offered to the listed employees. Given the complexities of the Workers' Compensation Act and the lack of science supporting these presumptions (Lyme disease excluded), Chesapeake Employers' and Injured Workers' Insurance Fund respectfully request said workers' compensation provisions be removed from Senate Bill 541.

*Contact: Carmine G. D'Alessandro
Chief Legal Officer
Chesapeake Employers Insurance Company/IWIF
(410)-494-2305
cdalessandro@ceiwc.com*

Support of SB 541 - Natural Resources - Maryland P

Uploaded by: Colby Ferguson

Position: FWA



Maryland Farm Bureau, Inc.

3358 Davidsonville Road • Davidsonville, MD 21035 • (410) 922-3426

February 16, 2022

To: Senate Budget & Taxation Committee
From: Maryland Farm Bureau, Inc.

Re: **Support of SB 541 - Natural Resources - Maryland Park Service and State Parks - Alterations (Great Maryland Outdoors Act)**

On behalf of our member families, I submit this written testimony in support of SB 541 with 2 amendments. This comprehensive bill addresses infrastructure, capacity, and accessibility needs within the Maryland Park Service and State parks, including establishing systems and processes for surveying infrastructure and critical maintenance needs, increasing the number of Maryland Park Service full-time employees, requiring the Department of Budget and Management to conduct certain staff reviews, and requiring the Department of Natural Resources to develop a capital improvement plan and a comprehensive long-range strategic plan.

Included in this bill is more funding for the Maryland Agland Preservation Foundation. Also in this bill is the possible use of the Program Open space payback funding. Maryland Farm Bureau supports the repayment of these funds and seeks to see some of these funds to cover the cost for the Urban Ag Water and Power Infrastructure Fund that is being established in HB 855. Also, we would like to see funding go to the Department of Natural Resource - Wildlife Services Division to assist with proper wildlife habitat maintenance on the state's parks, forests and wildlife management areas.

Maryland Farm Bureau Policy:

We support grant programs to provide infrastructure for urban farms. We urge Program Open Space revenues that were diverted to the General Fund to be repaid. We support using a portion of these repaid funds to be used to increase wildlife management in the state. This could include state cost share for vegetative fencing/sacrificial crops and wildlife fencing. We recommend that the larger share of open space funds be used for maintenance of present state-owned land rather than the acquisition of new land. We urge diverting a portion of the open space funds to be used for managing wildlife on state owned land.

Maryland Farm Bureau Amendments:

#1: If this bill is to use the Program Open Space payback funds, we would like the Urban Agriculture Water and Power Infrastructure Grant Fund and program to be included at \$500,000/year for 4 years starting in FY24.

#2: We would like to see dedicated funds appropriated to maintain the wildlife more properly in the state parks, forests and wildlife management areas at \$500,000/year for 4 years starting in FY24.

MARYLAND FARM BUREAU SUPPORTS SB 541 WITH TWO AMENDMENTS

Colby Ferguson
Director of Government Relations

For more information contact Colby Ferguson at (240) 578-0396

SB541 - Natural Resources - Maryland Park Service

Uploaded by: Dakota Matthews

Position: FWA



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Office: 410-841-5772 • Fax: 410-841-5987 • TTY: 800-735-2258
Email: rmc.mda@maryland.gov
Website: www.rural.maryland.gov
Charlotte Davis, Executive Director

John Hartline, Chair

Testimony in Support with amendments of
Senate Bill 541 - Natural Resources - Maryland Park Service and State Parks - Alterations (Great Maryland
Outdoors Act)
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
February 16, 2022

The Rural Maryland Council supports with amendments Senate Bill 541 - Natural Resources - Maryland Park Service and State Parks - Alterations (Great Maryland Outdoors Act). The Great Maryland Outdoors Act will benefit Maryland's agricultural and land preservation programs by ensuring additional resources for the preservation of additional land through programs such as the Rural Legacy Program, Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF), and the Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO). This legislation will replace and accelerate the current repayment schedule for previous diversions of funds from Program Open Space.

Program Open Space has shown success in preserving Maryland's land. According to Forever Maryland, there are about 1.8 million acres of preserved land in Maryland. The DNR State Land Inventory makes up over a quarter of that land with just under 500,000 acres. MALPF is the second largest preserver, preserving about 340,000 acres or 19%. The additional funding will allow for the transition of farms to the next generation, increased recreational and economic opportunities in local communities, and the preservation of contiguous uninterrupted forestland. As the pandemic proved, our state and local parks are more popular and necessary than ever. The preservation of land also helps with the stewardship of the land by allowing better maintenance and care of the land. For example, being able to monitor and control the intrusion of invasive species or being able to manage storm waters. Controlling these factors that can harm the land keep it healthy and usable for the future.

Stateside and localside Program Open Space are also important economic drivers in Rural Maryland. Enhanced recreational opportunities will bring in additional visitors to Rural Maryland, impacting and enhancing local economies. According to *Economic Impact of Tourism in Maryland*, a report conducted by Tourism Economics, Maryland had 42.1 million visitors in 2019 who spent \$18.6 billion in the State and generated 2.6 billion in state and local taxes. We support efforts to enhance our community parks and playgrounds but ask that the \$60 million transfer of funds for State land acquisition under Program Open Space be reduced or eliminated.

There are equity issues across the State relating to state parks and available open spaces. Along with Baltimore City, both Wicomico and Kent County lack state park facilities. The Maryland Department of Natural Resources in partnership with the University of Maryland School of Public Health created the "MD Park Equity Mapper" to show the equity rates of access to public lands across the State. This was done by accounting for factors such as walkability, population, race, age, and distance to public park space. This map shows low equity in rural areas such as parts of western and southern Maryland and the State's eastern shore. While rural areas have less population and more land, this does not equate to land that is available or accessible for recreation or public use. Many Maryland residents that live near the State's waters, whether it is the Bay, a lake or river, also have no way of accessing the nearby waters. By preserving land and expanding parks across the State, these equity issues can be addressed, and all Marylanders can have access to public parks. The Rural Maryland Council respectfully requests your favorable with amendments support of SB 541.

The Rural Maryland Council (RMC) is an independent state agency governed by a nonpartisan, 40-member board that consists of inclusive representation from the federal, state, regional, county and municipal governments, as well as the for-profit and nonprofit sectors. We bring together federal, state, county and municipal government officials as well as representatives of the for-profit and nonprofit sectors to identify challenges unique to rural communities and to craft public policy, programmatic or regulatory solutions.

"A Collective Voice for Rural Maryland"

SB0541-EHE_MACo_SWA.pdf

Uploaded by: Dominic Butchko

Position: FWA



Senate Bill 541

*Natural Resources - Maryland Park Service and State Parks - Alterations
(Great Maryland Outdoors Act)*

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**
WITH AMENDMENTS

To: Budget and Taxation and Education, Health,
and Environmental Affairs Committees

Date: February 16, 2022

From: Dominic J. Butchko

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS SB 541 WITH AMENDMENTS**. The bill would make broad and historic investments in Maryland's State Parks to improve service and accessibility. Among the funding changes in SB 541 is an alteration to repayment of local-side park funding – **MACo urges an amendment to remedy a worrisome diversion of these funds, and to expand on collaborative elements already in the bill.**

State parks are a proven asset in growing healthy communities. They complement the various county park systems, providing leisure space, recognition and reflection of historical events, and tools for economic development. Active and healthy spaces add to a high quality of life for Marylanders.

During the great recession, several areas of state government were forced to make drastic cuts to their operating budgets. One major change was a diversion of funds away from local Program Open Space to help support state parks. Fast forward to the global pandemic, where demand for parks surged, and this unwise short-term solution has been exposed as a poor long-term policy. While SB 541 proposes a wholesale realignment of park funding and payback, the window is wide open to remedy this weak link in park support. **Amendments could stabilize and enhance state parks funding from the General Fund, and still reinstate the traditional local one-half share of Program Open Space.**

Under SB 541, in establishing the Freedman's State Historical Park, the State will be undertaking an innovative partnership model first implemented between federal and state parks. Counties urge that this provision be expanded to encourage more partnership parks, particularly in those few counties still lacking a state park, or where underserved populations can be more effectively reached.

SB 541 makes sensible investments in the state parks system and its next steps. Amidst these elements, amendments to the local funding and park partnerships could make a productive bill better, as part of a comprehensive approach to public recreation across Maryland. Accordingly, MACo urges the Committee to issue a **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** report for SB 541.

SB541 MACPRA Position Great MD Outdoors 2-14-22.pd

Uploaded by: Steve Miller

Position: FWA



MARYLAND ASSOCIATION OF COUNTY
PARK & RECREATION ADMINISTRATORS
(MACPRA)

**SB541 Natural Resources – Maryland Park Service and State Parks –
Alterations (Great Maryland Outdoors Act)**

*Repealing the Park Advisory Commission and establishing the Parks and Recreation Commission in DNR;
addressing infrastructure, capacity and accessibility needs within the Maryland Park Service and State
parks;*

February 14, 2022

MACPRA Position: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS

“The Great Maryland Outdoors Act” is an ambitious and long overdue investment in the landscape, infrastructure and human services associated with the Maryland State Park Service. The pandemic response revealed the service gaps and capacity limits of our public service systems on multiple levels within our communities. Access to the restorative value of nature and the outdoors contained within our State Parks was one of those critical gaps – access that was not just geographically limited, but also compromised by capacity limitations due to low staffing levels, inadequate infrastructure, and outdated public communication strategies.

MACPRA recognizes the funding for this initiative is primarily sourced from the \$174M of State General Funds pledged in previous legislative action to payback the designated account established for land conservation and local park development purposes.

The great Maryland outdoors is not limited to State Parks. Local park land is a vital link to the public’s outdoor recreation experience, and the incentive and support to local government to expand the reach of conservation through the creation of community parks was part of the strategic design that established the real estate transfer tax as an enduring and sustaining funding strategy for Maryland’s landmark Program Open Space initiative in 1969. This legacy is still relevant today.

MACPRA supports this legislative proposal with one amendment and a recommendation.

The amendment simply extends the geographic reach to establish a “Partnership Park”. The legislation is prescriptive to the northeastern region of Montgomery County for the establishment of the Freedman’s Historical Park. MACPRA recommends that the sponsors broaden the scope of the General Assembly’s review of other proposals that meet the partnership definition --- when State, local government and/or non-profit organizations forms partnerships to increase public access and conserve and interpret the historic landscape.

The recommendation links the loss of the local payback of Program Open Space funds to the Administration’s FY2023 capital budget allocation to the Parks and Playground Infrastructure (PPI) program. MACPRA



MARYLAND ASSOCIATION OF COUNTY PARK & RECREATION ADMINISTRATORS (MACPRA)

recognizes the legislative leadership's 2022 initiative to appropriate \$85 to local government for park restoration and expansion initiatives. This funding level is replicated in FY2023 with \$75M currently undesignated for local park projects. MACPRA has held conversations with lead sponsors and is assured that support exists for the FY2023 PPI investment. MACPRA further recommends that the allocation of the undesignated portion of this fund be delegated to the MD-DNR with input from MACPRA leadership.

The Maryland Association of County Park & Recreation Administrators (MACPRA) is an affiliate of the Maryland Association of Counties and represents the Parks and Recreation departments of all 23 counties and Baltimore City – the professionals engaged in the delivery of Parks and Recreation services throughout Maryland.

SB 541 MD Park Service and State Parks (Elfreth) B

Uploaded by: Barbara Wilkins

Position: INFO



Maryland

DEPARTMENT OF BUDGET
AND MANAGEMENT

LARRY HOGAN
Governor

BOYD K. RUTHERFORD
Lieutenant Governor

DAVID R. BRINKLEY
Secretary

MARC L. NICOLE
Deputy Secretary

SENATE BILL 541 Natural Resources – Maryland Park Service and State Parks – Alterations (Elfreth)

STATEMENT OF INFORMATION

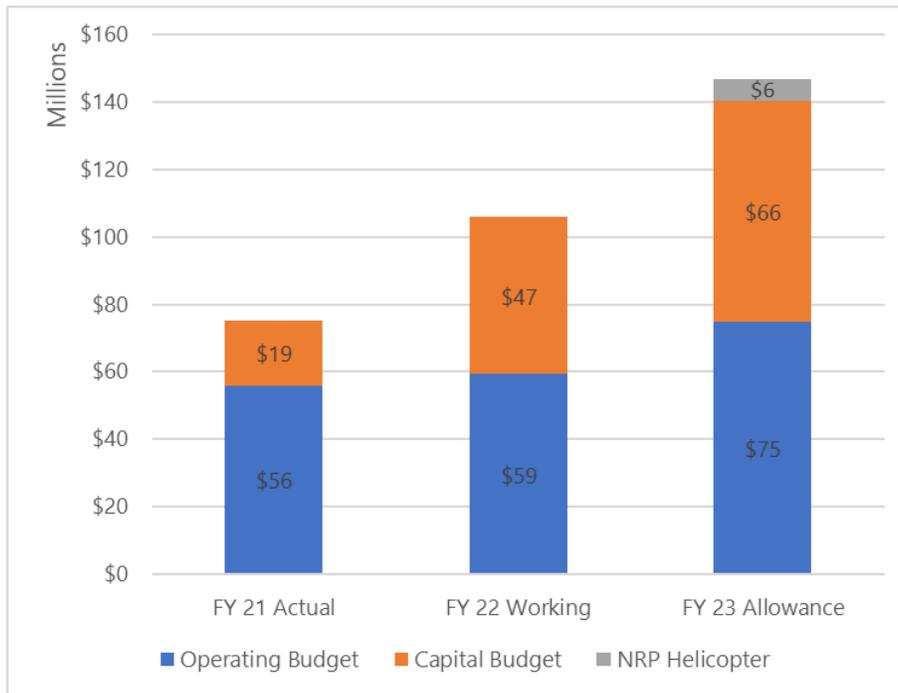
DATE: February 16, 2022

COMMITTEE: Senate Budget & Taxation and Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

SUMMARY OF BILL: SB 541, in part, establishes a Park System Critical Maintenance Fund and mandates a General Fund appropriation in FY 2024 in the amount of \$80 million; establishes a Park System Capital Improvements and Acquisition Fund and mandates a General Fund appropriation in FY 2024 in the amount of \$70 million; requires the Department of Natural Resources to add 100 full-time classified employees to the Park Service by July 1, 2024 and dictates a specified number of these new employees to specific units; requires the Department of Budget and Management to conduct a staff adequacy review report every two years for the Park Service, as well as a salary review every three years for the Park Service; requires that Park Service Associates, Forest Rangers, Park Rangers, and Wildlife Rangers be recognized as Emergency Services Personnel and provides them with enhanced workers' compensation and tax benefits; establishes a nine member, legislative and Executive Parks and Recreation Commission to provide oversight of the Park Service and be staffed by the Department of Legislative Services; modifies the repayment and dedication of funds previously transferred from the transfer tax to the General Fund and modifies the dedication of funds; and expresses legislative intent authorizing the Governor by June 30, 2022 to transfer \$60 million from Program Open Space state land acquisition program to the Park System Capital Improvements and Acquisition Fund created herein. Effective July 1, 2022.

EXPLANATION: The FY 2023 operating budget allowance for the Maryland Parks Service is \$74.7 million – a twenty year high. The FY 2023 capital development allocation for parks from transfer tax revenues is \$46.9 million. This is supplemented by \$25 million in critical maintenance funding in the Dedicated Purpose Account, thereby allocating a total of \$146.6 million for parks in the FY 2023 budget. The parks budget has grown 71% since the beginning of the Administration's tenure.

TOTAL BUDGET FOR THE PARKS SERVICE



The Administration has been committed to repaying the \$242.2 million in Program Open Space transfer tax revenues that was raided by prior Administrations – \$98.5 has been repaid, including \$30.5 million in the FY 2023 budget allowance. The legislation accelerates the remaining repayments through FY 2031 to FY 2024 (\$184 million), and FY 2025 (\$2.7 million) and dedicates or realigns those funds to specific programs, including:

- MARBIDO \$10 million
 - In FY 2025, MARBIDCO is allocated an additional \$2.7 million
- MALPF \$18 million
- Rural Legacy \$ 5 million

- Park System Capital Maintenance Fund \$80 million
- Capital Improvements and Acquisition Fund \$70 million

Establishing the Park Service Capital Maintenance Fund and Capital Improvements and Acquisition Fund as non-lapsing special funds allows the monies allocated in FY 2024 to remain in the Funds, regardless of how long it takes to spend down the mandated amounts and despite the provision that the \$80 million in the Parks System Critical Maintenance Fund must be spent before July 1, 2026. **A more nuanced analysis of how quickly this funding can realistically be spent is recommended.**

The FY 2023 Budget allowance for Park Service staffing has 261 full-time classified positions and 296 contractual positions. The bill requires the addition of 100 full-time classified positions by July 1, 2024, including: five positions in the Engineering and Construction unit; five positions in the Land Acquisition and planning unit; and one Volunteer Management Program Coordinator. Again, to recruit and hire 100 additional positions is dependent upon many factors outside the control of the agency, including current job market realities – a longer phase-in to ramp up staffing is recommended. **Further, the bill requires the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) to conduct a staff adequacy review of the Park**

Service every two years (no due date) and a staff salary review of the Park Service every three years (no due date), both of which should precede the mandate to hire 100 full-time classified positions. The extent to which staffing is increased should be better informed; the staff adequacy review and salary reviews are key elements in determining staffing needs.

**For additional information, contact Barbara Wilkins at
(410) 260-6371 or barbara.wilkins1@maryland.gov**

'22 SB 541 DNR-MD Park Service & State Parks DGS L

Uploaded by: Ellen Robertson

Position: INFO

Larry Hogan
Governor

Boyd K. Rutherford
Lt Governor



Ellington E. Churchill, Jr.
Secretary

Nelson E. Reichart
Deputy Secretary

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

BILL: **Senate Bill 541**
Natural Resources - Maryland Park Service and State Parks - Alterations
Great Maryland Outdoors Act

COMMITTEE: Budget and Taxation

DATE: February 16, 2022

POSITION: Letter of Information

Upon review of Senate Bill 541 Natural Resources - Maryland Park Service and State Parks - Alterations (Great Maryland Outdoors Act), the Maryland Department of General Services (DGS), provides these comments for your consideration.

This bill would require DGS to work with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), to create an asset management database along with providing the necessary staff and technology for the operation of the database.

This bill establishes new funding streams for DNR, in which the DGS Design, Construction, and Energy Division (DCE) and DGS Office of State Procurement (OSP) would be involved with most of the related work because of DNR's current \$50,000 small procurement authority. In FY 2024 an appropriation of \$80 million goes into the *Park System Critical Maintenance Fund*. The funding of \$80 million must be expended by July 1, 2026 and would entail an enormous impact to DGS because of our required oversight of the procurement, project management, and construction work associated with the fund.

The second fund established in the bill is the *Park System Capital Improvement and Acquisition Fund* with an appropriation of \$70 million in FY 2024. DGS would be actively involved with all carve-outs in this fund, which include:

- \$5 million for climate change mitigation strategies
- \$5 million for historic preservation
- \$20 million for transportation improvements
- \$10 million for increasing water access
- \$30 million for land acquisition



Page 2
Senate Bill 541
February 16, 2022

To support DNR, DGS would need additional support for their project management and construction inspection teams as the bill indicates funding would be continual. This personnel increase would equate to an initial expenditure of ~\$476,000 in FY 2023 and increasing annually to ~\$1.2 million in FY 2027. **It must be emphasized that it would not be possible to absorb the added project funding of ~\$150 million using existing staff without a significant negative impact to work quality, quantity, and efficiency.**

Senate Bill 541 alters the definition of a “small procurement” for capital projects or maintenance with a value that is \$100,000 or less. **Currently, DNR has a small procurement threshold of \$50,000 and the move to \$100,000, at this time, would not be advisable. DNR must have the necessary systems, processes and procurement staff in place in order to conduct these larger procurements.**

For additional information, contact Ellen Robertson at 410-260-2908.

SB 541 - Natural Resources - Maryland Park Service

Uploaded by: Rachel London

Position: INFO



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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