



The Honorable Cheryl Kagan
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chair Kagan,

I am writing in support of SB522 – Child Safe Zone Program – Establishment (Equitable Access to Safe Parks Act). As the nation’s largest Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI), LISC has a 40+ year track record of delivering social and financial impact through technical assistance and financing in 38 cities and 2,200 rural counties. Together with residents and partners, LISC forges resilient and inclusive communities of opportunity across America.

LISC recognizes that public safety policy must be grounded in comprehensive and equitable approaches that empower communities and promote healthy redevelopment. In my experience implementing violence reduction efforts, it is clear that there is a direct correlation between the physical environment and community safety. As an example, the research of Dr. Charles Branas at Columbia University links the greening of vacant lots in Philadelphia, PA with consistent reductions in gun assaults and reductions in vandalism.

People need well-maintained buildings and outdoor spaces to feel safe. We know that poorly maintained parks and public spaces have a major impact on community health outcomes. Blighted and vacant properties, including local parks, attract crime and create other public health concerns that undermine the quality of life of residents. In addition to doing a disservice to residents, it also discourages critical investments in these areas. In order to enhance safety, improve health outcomes, and encourage equitable development LISC recognizes that a comprehensive evidence-based approach is the best path forward.

In my role, I often refer to the [Inclusive Healthy Places Framework](#) developed by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Gehl Institute. The framework provides guidance to municipal leaders, policymakers, and local partners on how to design safe, equitable, and healthy places. As highlighted in the report, the physical and social characteristics of our environments influence our ability to access and benefit from safe streets, parks, quality transportation and meaningful public engagement. Cared-for public spaces like parks go a

long way in garnering stronger social cohesion and collective efficacy by providing a safe place for positive community interaction.

By supporting the Child Safe Zones, it is my hope that this bill will help communicate that parks need to be safe spaces for children and families to gather and create community bonds.

In addition to seeing signs placed in prominent locations of the park showing that the park is a “Child Safe Zone,” park users will also benefit from seeing improvement to parks that deter violence and crime.

On behalf of LISC, and the communities we serve, I request that you give SB522 a FAVORABLE report.

LeVar Michael

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