



POSITION STATEMENT

**TESTIMONY PRESENTED TO THE SENATE EDUCATION, HEALTH,
AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**SENATE BILL 522 – STATE AND LOCAL PARKS – CHILD SAFE ZONE PROGRAM –
ESTABLISHMENT (EQUITABLE ACCESS TO SAFE PARKS ACT)**

Sponsor – Senators Hettleman and Elfreth

March 1, 2022

**DONALD C. FRY
PRESIDENT & CEO
GREATER BALTIMORE COMMITTEE**

Position: Support

Senate Bill 522 creates the Child Safe Zone Program in the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to improve public safety at State and local parks, as well as a fund to finance the program. The funds to improve safety at state and local parks through environmental design components such as enhanced lighting, landscaping, and security cameras. The funds can also be used to pay for increased staffing, including security.

Environmental design improvements can include prominently placed signage, enhanced lighting, and improved access and security. The basic guiding principles to safety in parks include access control (gates, fencing, furniture placement), territorial reinforcement (signs, trees, paving), natural surveillance (on-site surveillance during programming and visibility from roadways), and maintenance (making timely repairs to broken equipment, painting over graffiti, etc.)

The level of violence in the state, and in particular Baltimore City, is unacceptable and substantive changes are required to improve public safety and ensure economic vitality and competitiveness. For these reasons, improving public safety has been identified by the Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC) as a key economic development and public safety issue that needs to be urgently addressed.

Implementing the Child Safe Zone program will signal that the park has been designed to create a safer space for children and families. The GBC supports using environmental design to enhance access to safe public parks as a community and economic development tool. Safer parks make a community more inviting and people and businesses are more likely to locate in a jurisdiction with safe parks.

The GBC has recommended a two-pronged approach to reduce violent crime. The first prong addresses crime control through enhanced public safety programs focused on repeat violent offenders and better coordination among law enforcement agencies. The second prong - crime prevention - must be instituted simultaneously with crime control efforts. It is critically important to address the root societal causes of crime with programs that address poverty, lack of employment, need for job training programs, and an increase in after-school programs, etc. The GBC backs these types of initiatives with the same weight afforded crime control strategies.

Senate Bill 522 is consistent with this two-pronged approach by helping to create safer community spaces for children, and making parks less attractive to those committing violent crime.

For these reasons, the Greater Baltimore Committee urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 522.

GREATER BALTIMORE COMMITTEE

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The Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC) is a non-partisan, independent, regional business advocacy organization comprised of hundreds of businesses -- large, medium and small -- educational institutions, nonprofit organizations and foundations located in Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Carroll, Harford, and Howard counties as well as Baltimore City. The GBC is a 67-year-old, private-sector membership organization with a rich legacy of working with government to find solutions to problems that negatively affect our competitiveness and viability.