



*Public Safety and Security Specialists*

SB522 – Parks – Child Safe Zone program – Equitable Access to Safe Parks Act  
Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee – March 1, 2022  
Testimony of Jeffrey J. Steger, Jeffrey Steger and Associates, Public Safety Consultants  
Position: **SUPPORT**

I write in support of SB522 – Child Safe Zone Program – Providing Equitable Access to Safe Parks Act. I am retired from the Arlington County Virginia Police Department. I have trained thousands of Police Officers and community members in the concepts of **Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)** and have conducted hundreds of safety and security assessments of a variety of properties for safety and security, including parks and recreation areas. In fact, I conducted the assessment of the Trolley Trail that travels from College Park, MD to Washington, DC, and I recognize public safety as a key element of the redevelopment of communities and community policing. Indeed, I am acutely aware of the impact of violence and crime on our communities, and on the health outcomes of residents of these communities.

This bill will help communicate in a strong way that parks are a safe place for children and families to congregate, creating community interaction and providing a respite from the pressures of daily life. And for children who are exposed to violence of any kind in their lives, having a place where they can play safely and engage socially is critical to their recovery and happiness. As the need for parks, recreation areas, open space, green space and linear trails has increased over the past few years, so too has there been an increase in the need for the safety and security of those spaces. Law enforcement is not the only answer and designing parks with safety and security in mind is more cost effective than simply adding manpower.

**Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design.** The concept of CPTED (pronounced “cep- ted”)– Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design is based upon the belief that “the proper design and effective use of the built environment can lead to a reduction in the fear and incidence of crime and an improvement in the quality of life”. It is a cost effective concept that

can be applied to any park which will decrease the opportunity for crime and increase the sense of safety and security for legitimate users.

Every agency involved in park design and management should have someone trained in the concepts of CPTED to lend that experience and expertise to any new development that is occurring within a jurisdiction. That person should be part of the plans review process and their input should have the same weight and value as the fire inspector, or the electrical inspector. It is much easier and cost effective to build any facility with these concepts in mind, prior to the construction, than to come back, at a later time, and re-construct for safety and security.

The use of CPTED sends a message to the users of any facility that they are moving from an open, uncontrolled space (street, sidewalk) to a more controlled environment. This would include parks, where there is a different expectation of behavior. CPTED gives the user the feeling that they are moving from that open space, where any manner of behavior is acceptable, to a private space where there is a much different expectation of behavior with control, rules and regulations, and when needed, enforcement. The feeling that is trying to be created is that users' actions and behavior are noticed, that someone is in charge of the property, and that there is some control, management, and supervision, over the property, that not any kind of behavior is acceptable.

**What Are Basic Concepts of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design?** CPTED's basic concepts are **Access Control, Natural Surveillance, Territoriality and Maintenance**. It should be noted that lighting in a park can be controversial. If the park is lit at night, the locality is implying that the park is open and safe. If there is not any lighting and the posted hours of operation are from dusk until dawn, the locality is saying that the park is closed and should not be accessed at night. This may necessitate gates, locks, and personnel to lock the parks at night. The entrance to the park should be clearly marked and celebrated so that users know where the entrance is located. Note that if the park is fenced, there must be well marked points of egress in the event of an emergency.

Parking lots, picnic areas, trailheads – so-called “day use” areas - and other facilities used at night should be located near streets and other activity areas that are clearly observable by other legitimate users. Citizens should be encouraged to report suspicious activity and the park should be part of the routine patrol of the assigned law enforcement officer.

Restrooms are high on the amenity list of facilities for legitimate users. Restrooms should be located in high traffic areas where there is an abundance of natural surveillance. Restrooms should be constructed of graffiti resistant materials. Fixtures should be constructed of stainless

steel, not porcelain. Restrooms should be single occupancy and not gender specific. Doors should have heavy duty locking devices and secured every evening at a specific hour. Water, air dryers, and soap dispensers should be automatic, motion activated to minimize trash and vandalism – activities which could make users feel that an area is not property valued and overseen.

Equipment should be kept in good repair, grounds well maintained, the canopy of trees should be 6 to 8 feet from the ground to allow unobstructed sight lines, and no gathering concealed from the public's view. Graffiti should be removed immediately. Property boundaries should be clearly marked and fencing in good repair. Placement of an emergency call box, within the confines of the park, may be beneficial to aid citizens who wish to report suspicious activity. Maintenance workers should be uniformed with the name of the employee pinned or stitched on the shirt and the name of the organization clearly visible. Rules for the park must be clearly posted in more than one language.

**Engaging the Community.** Local businesses and civic organizations should be encouraged to “adopt a park”. This concept provides additional eyes and ears to help control the public space. Implementing the concepts of CPTED will help achieve a goal of this bill to help communicate in a strong way that parks are a safe place for children and families to congregate, creating community interaction and providing a respite from the pressures of daily life. And for children who are exposed to violence of any kind in their lives, having a place where they can play safely and engage socially.

I request that you give SB522 a FAVORABLE report.

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