



MARYLAND ASSOCIATION OF COUNTY  
PARK & RECREATION ADMINISTRATORS  
(MACPRA)

**HB727 Natural Resources – Maryland Park Service and State Parks –  
Alterations (Great Maryland Outdoors Act)**

*Addressing infrastructure, capacity and accessibility needs within the Maryland Park Service and State parks;*

February 21, 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limited, but also compromised by capacity limitations due to low staffing levels, inadequate infrastructure, and outdated public communication strategies.

While MACPRA supports this legislative proposal, it also recognizes that 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.

Recognizing the important link between State and local parks, MACPRA supports this proposal with two suggested amendments and a recommendation.

1. MACPRA recommends expanding language to extend 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.
2. MACPRA has concerns that the proposed legislation would establish new worker’s compensation benefits for various classes of County parks employees. While these extended benefits could be a valuable recruiting tool for needed State Park employees, at the same time, it would place a tremendous



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financial burden on the Counties to the extent local government employees qualify as park rangers, forest rangers, park service associates or wildlife rangers. MACPRA recommends these provisions of the bill be removed or altered so as to not place this burden on County budgets.

The recommendation links the possible 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 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.

MACPRA also 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.*