



# PARKS & PEOPLE

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February 23, 2022

Environment and Transportation Committee

HB788 – State and Local Parks – Child Safe Zone Program – Establishment (Equitable Access to Safe Parks Act)

Testimony of Franklin Lance

Position: **SUPPORT**

I am writing to SUPPORT HB788 - State and Local Parks – Child Safe Zone Program – Establishment (Equitable Access to Safe Parks Act). Parks & People is a 38-year-old Baltimore City based nonprofit focused on improving Baltimore through state-of-the-art green spaces, parks, and playgrounds. Most directly, we focus on the city's black butterfly neighborhoods and seek to remove the decades of blight and disenfranchisement by replacing vacant and blighted buildings with community green spaces, active parks, and playgrounds as a means of delivering hope and healing. Since 2016, Parks & People has transformed over 30 acres of Baltimore into these spaces and invested over \$7M into formerly ignored communities.

**Community Need:** A major asset of a healthy community is resident and patron access to a park. More directly, the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) uses a metric that everyone should be within a ten-minute walk (.25 mile) of a community green space or park. Over the years of Baltimore's explosive population growth (circa 1890 – 1950), such green space was often sacrificed in favor of multi-dwelling housing and motor vehicle ingress and egress into the city. With Baltimore's 70-year population decline (1950 – 2020), Baltimore faces a housing surplus for approximately 365,000 who no longer call Baltimore City home. Unfortunately, most of these vacant properties are in the black butterfly communities in which residents had not the means/influence to address the problem, and state/city policies determined these communities expendable.

In response, Parks & People made a strategic decision in 2016 to focus on this problem and build state-of-the-art green spaces in these communities. We led a \$1.3M improvement of Henrietta Lacks Park. We built parks in Easterwood, Darley, Franklinton Square, Johnston Square and Upton. We built playgrounds at Liberty and Hamilton Elementary Schools, with plans to do likewise at Cecil and Johnston Square. These spaces are harbingers of hope and can be therapeutic places for otherwise traumatized communities.

**Safety:** At Parks & People, we assert these communities deserve quality places at which kids can play, adults can gather, and all can be safe. As we know from Maslow's hierarchy of needs, people must feel safe in order to grow into their full potential. Likewise, these green spaces and parks must be safe places for all to reach their full potential of community gathering places. This bill is a start in the direction of making it known that these spaces must be safe. I purposely said "start" as I assert the bill does not go far enough by being absent of any enforcement measures.



To its credit, the bill seeks to make parks a “Child Safe Zone.” This is a start I can and do support. The signage and lighting sends a message of safety. Maybe the message is not as strong, as I would like, but it is a message of safety nonetheless.

Therefore, on behalf of Parks & People, Inc., I request you give HB788 a FAVORABLE report.

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