

# **HB0727.ShoreRivers.Support.pdf**

Uploaded by: Annie Richards

Position: FAV



**Testimony in SUPPORT of HB0727– Natural Resources – Maryland Park Service and State Parks – Alterations (The Great Maryland Outdoors Act)**

February 23, 2022

Dear Chairman Barve and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in **SUPPORT** of **HB0727** on behalf of ShoreRivers. ShoreRivers is a river protection group on Maryland's Eastern Shore with over 2000 members. Our mission is to protect and restore our Eastern Shore waterways through science-based advocacy, restoration, and education.

Maryland's Eastern Shore is defined by its "open space" and rural character, but how many of these open spaces are meant for the general public? Equitable public access to the natural resources of our state is critical for a person's mental and physical health, and promotes a natural sense of stewardship; you will not protect what you do not love, and you cannot love what you do not know.

The Great Maryland Outdoors Act will increase the infrastructure funding available to public parks, and prioritize connectivity to local communities in an equitable manner so that there are more public spaces available for all Marylanders to enjoy. Key actions of this HB0727 include: Establish a Parks and Recreation Commission to address capacity and accessibility of existing parks; establish a Sustainable Forestry Council for the State; create 100 new green jobs within the parks service, establish a new non lapsing fund for park related capital improvements and land acquisition; and bolster funding for the Maryland Rural Legacy Program and the Maryland Agriculture Land Preservation Fund.

As Chester Riverkeeper, I work with counties and towns within my watershed to improve and expand public open spaces for all communities. Parks have the ability to connect more residents with our waterways, as well as provide opportunities for reforestation or increased tree canopy, both of which are valuable green infrastructure practices that improve water quality. Increased funding and staff resources for park maintenance, capacity, infrastructure, connectivity, and equity will help organizations like ShoreRivers achieve local public access goals, connect residents to nature, and foster community stewardship to improve water quality on the Eastern Shore.

For these reasons stated above, ShoreRivers urges the Committee to adopt a **FAVORABLE** report on **HB0727**.

Sincerely,

**Annie Richards**

Chester Riverkeeper, on behalf of:

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**ShoreRivers**

Isabel Hardesty, Executive Director

Annie Richards, Chester Riverkeeper | Matt Pluta, Choptank Riverkeeper

Elle Bassett, Miles-Wye Riverkeeper | Zack Kelleher, Sassafras Riverkeeper

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# **Great MD Outdoors Act Testimony PDF.pdf**

Uploaded by: Daniel Spedden

Position: FAV



# TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 541 2022 Maryland Legislative Session

## Great Maryland Outdoors Act

Daniel P. Spedden

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That is me on the left  
being backed up by  
Natural Resource Police  
Officer Josh Keeny.

I am Dan Spedden and I  
managed Greenbrier State  
Park for 23 years from 1990  
until my retirement in 2013.







Greenbrier State Park opens at 8:00 am, this is the scene at the park entrance at 6:00 am.  
This is US Rt 40 a 50 mile per hour State Highway.





A closer view on the entrance to Greenbrier State Park.





People wait patiently for the line to move.





The line continues over the gently rolling hills



2.5 miles into  
adjoining  
Frederick County





It is two hours before opening time and there are 706 vehicles in line for 570 spaces in Greenbrier State Park. 136 cars are turned away immediately, Rangers will turn away would be visitors for the next 7 hours. This happened a record 25 times in 2016, 22 closures is a good average.





After entering  
Greenbrier State Park,  
cars meander along  
the entrance lane to  
the contact booth.



The traffic control operation has a high manpower demand.





This scenario is playing out all over the State with 18 State Parks reporting “Park Full” closures 12 of these parks experience closures with similar frequency to Greenbrier State Park.





The smiling  
faces of the  
occupants of  
the last car in.





The reward for being up early  
enough to make the 570-car cut.

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# **GMOA Written Testimony House Final.pdf**

Uploaded by: Dean Hughes

Position: FAV



# MARYLAND RANGERS ASSOCIATION

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## Testimony in Support of:

### **SB541 / HB727 – Maryland Park Service and State Parks – Alterations - The Great Maryland Outdoors Act**

Dear Madam Chair McIntosh, Chairman Barve, members of the Appropriations Committee, members of the Environment and Transportation Committee,

From the Allegany Mountains overlooking Deep Creek Lake State Park, to the waters of the Atlantic Ocean coming ashore at Assateague State Park, Maryland offers 75 of the most geographically diverse, naturally beautiful, and historically significant parks in the United States. These mystical settings, wisely preserved and protected decades ago so that they could continue to be treasured today, are now visited more than 20 million times annually. This serves as undisputable evidence of, and demands that we take note of, the priority that Marylanders place on their State Parks, and the role they serve in enhancing the quality of their lives. While this validation is gratifying, Marylanders are collectively loving their parks to death, stressing the existing park system and aging critical infrastructure, and compromising the very essence of our mission to forever preserve these natural wonders.

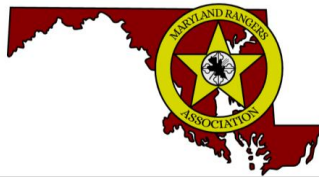
On August 6, 2021, Senate President Bill Ferguson and Speaker Adrienne A. Jones announced the creation of a legislative commission to study the needs of, and make consequential recommendations for, Maryland's State Park system. Maryland's dedicated State Park Rangers were humbled to be given the opportunity to participate in this once-in-a-generation initiative, providing their first-hand professional observations of the pressing needs of the parks in their care, as well as suggestions for potential solutions to enhance our ability to effectively pursue public safety, resource protection, and outdoor recreation equity goals.

On the pages that follow, you will find the written testimony that the Maryland Rangers Association submitted to the State Park Investment Commission, which included action items intended to address what Rangers view as some of the most significant challenges. The Great Maryland Outdoors Act is seen by those Rangers as the catalyst that will alter the trajectory of our State Park system, making long-overdue investments in funding, maintenance, staffing, and land acquisition, and ushering in a new era in our State Park system's history, one which future generations will look back on with admiration and gratitude for visionary leadership and bold action. On behalf of Maryland's Rangers, Maryland's State Parks, and every Marylander, we urge a Favorable Report on this comprehensive recreation and conservation effort so that you and your loved ones, and millions of Maryland families, may forever enjoy the precious natural, cultural, historical, and recreational opportunities inherently available in our State.

Sincerely,

*Ranger Dean Hughes*

Ranger Dean Hughes  
President  
Maryland Rangers Association  
[mdranger2020@gmail.com](mailto:mdranger2020@gmail.com)



**Record Visitation / Overcrowding –The number of visitors to State Parks has doubled since 2013 and repeatedly set new attendance records, including a 45% increase from 2019 to 2020, and continued increases to-date in 2021.**

Excessive demand at State Parks leads to frequent closures of many developed day-use parks, **primarily those with water access**, and results in increased pressure on surrounding undeveloped areas, leading to a compromised visitor experience, significant resource degradation and impacts to neighboring communities. These outcomes run counter to one of the most important and sought-after benefits of State Parks, that being the enhancement of the health and well-being, as well as the economic prosperity, of people.

Developing additional park areas **with water access** would provide more recreational opportunities and reduce pressure on existing resources. However, significant additional staff resources are already needed to meet the demands of existing operations. Any enhancements of the acquisition aspect of public lands must be paired with enhancements to the staffing and operational component.

**Action Items:**

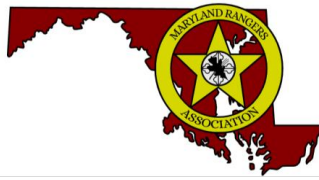
1. As addressed by the Commission, a full inventory and assessment of existing State Park units / properties should be conducted to identify those **areas which could provide water access within reasonable proximity to the more heavily populated areas of the state**, to determine their viability for further development and enhanced access if additional staff, equipment, facilities and all operational requirements are provided in order to allow for the safe public use and efficient operation of those existing units / properties.

2. The commission should also recommend a comprehensive assessment of acquisition opportunities to create new waterfront parks in or near Baltimore, the District of Columbia, and other heavily populated areas, to serve the critical need for access to open space for swimming and fishing in locations that are easy to reach from metropolitan counties.

**Staffing - The Maryland Park Service (MPS) has identified a need for additional Rangers and other personnel / resources to effectively manage ever-growing demands.**

Visitation to State Parks has doubled since the Department of Natural Resources and Department of Budget and Management collaborated on a **five-year Strategic Plan** which was **submitted to the General Assembly in 2013**, identifying an **additional 70 positions** needed for the operation and management of the then-66 state parks. In the eight years since the Strategic Plan was submitted, **25 new State Parks and areas have been acquired / opened, yet only 13 permanent positions have been added.**

In order to meet its mission in a rapidly urbanizing state, the MPS strategically acquires new acreage and parkland as it becomes available, but is rarely successful in adding positions, budgets, vehicles and equipment, and other resources to manage the acquisition. The MPS needs adequately funded New Facility Requests to be viewed favorably, and acted upon, by DBM.



### **Action Items:**

1. The MRA submits to the Commission that the **minimum threshold for supplemental staff is the 70 positions** recommended by the 2013 Strategic Plan, and will further submit that the significant increase in visitation since 2013, the addition of additional operational units / areas since 2013, as well as the proposed future acquisition of additional properties, require the **addition of approximately 150-200 classified positions** (managerial, operational, maintenance, administrative, naturalist, historian and planning personnel).
2. The MRA will further stress that every additional staff position must be accompanied by a **supplemental budget allocation that will adequately support the work of that specific employee**, i.e. the vehicles, equipment, offices, shops and all fiscal resources necessary to support the effective functioning of those staff.
3. The Commission should identify or develop a **formal, perpetual and sustainable funding mechanism** to accompany and support every new acquisition which involves a new operational unit of the State Park system, with the necessary staff (managerial, operational, maintenance, administrative, naturalists, historians and planning personnel), as well as vehicles, equipment, offices, shops and all fiscal resources necessary to support the effective functioning of those staff.

### **Human Resources – Seasonal and Classified employee recruitment and hiring processes are excessively rigid and protracted.**

State Parks rely on a **very robust surge of short-term seasonal employees** to operate visitor centers, contact stations, beaches and campgrounds, as well as to perform grounds maintenance and other mission-critical functions during the busiest times of the year. **The inability to adequately staff any State Park function compromises public safety, resource protection and the visitor experience.**

The **timeline to hire a seasonal employee is approximately two months**, in many cases including rehires for vacancies occurring in the middle of the three-month summer season. **Classified vacancies are sometimes carried for up to a year or more**, for critical operational functions at parks already deemed in need of additional staff.

### **Action Items:**

1. Given the unique nature of hiring 800 seasonal employees, and replacing those employees, as necessary, in an expeditious fashion, the MPS should be provided with an administrative **waiver to the current JobAps hiring process**, which is not well-adapted to the timely initial hire and/or replacement hiring of temporary employees during a condensed period of high demand for critical operational staff, i.e. the busy summer season in State Parks.
2. Given the officially designated and recognized essential nature and status of 100% of MPS operational staff, an **expedited process to backfill classified vacancies** is needed, e.g. the **elimination of the requirement to request Hiring Freeze Exemptions (HFEs) for all critical operational positions.**



**Budget / Funding** – Despite ever-increasing attendance and associated demands, statutorily dedicated MPS funding sources are often redirected to balance the statewide or DNR budget, or for other purposes. Repayments of mandated funding are often delayed and, if and when made, are earmarked with restrictions.

**Action Items:**

1. The General Assembly should take the action necessary to mandate the **immediate and full repayment of all Program Open Space funds** previously redirected / deferred.
2. The General Assembly and appropriate Executive Departments should collaborate to identify a permanent, sustainable dedicated funding source that can adequately fund the additional resources identified and recommended by the Commission. **This funding source should not redirect / reallocate existing funding sources, e.g. POS funding, from local or county parks and recreation agencies**, as these partners perform a critical role in addressing the surplus demand for outdoor recreational opportunities. This mandatory funding is seen as the “**Glendening Commission**” counterpart to the **Kirwan Commission**, and could do for State Parks what that Commission did for the state’s educational system (for a fraction of the cost).

**\$68 Million Critical Maintenance Backlog** – Many State Parks were developed in the 1930s through the 1960s, and, in many cases, critical infrastructure is original and far beyond its life expectancy.

Recurring delays and deferrals of capital project and critical maintenance funding, at a time when park attendance is at historically record high levels, results in straining and overwhelming infrastructure, leading to facility breakdowns, compromised visitor experiences, loss of services, and impacts to public safety.

This backlog also represents the Department’s inability to meet its responsibilities with regard to **preserving and restoring the significant number of historical / cultural resources** in its care, as well as the inability to move forward with **integrating green technology** into the State Park infrastructure and **modeling sustainable practices** for both the public and private entities.

**DNR’s Engineering and Construction Unit is impeded by critical staffing shortages** and unable to manage additional projects / funds with existing personnel.

**Action Item:**

1. The General Assembly and appropriate Executive Departments should collaborate to utilize current and anticipated federal funding to eliminate the existing critical maintenance backlog over the next several years. In order to accomplish this, and to avoid future backlogs created, in part, by inadequate staff to manage these projects, the DNR’s Engineering and Construction unit should be provided with supplemental permanent classified staff. The General Assembly should take the action necessary to mandate the **immediate and full repayment of all Program Open Space funds** previously redirected / deferred.
2. The critical maintenance program must include a robust funding allocation dedicated to the **preservation and restoration of historical / cultural resources** in the care of the Department, to ensure the integrity and permanent viability of those resources, and to better **enable the interpretation of difficult histories** of many of those places and sites, stories which have been historically underrepresented.



3. The capital and critical maintenance programs should include funding sufficient to allow the Department to modernize and integrate **green technology and sustainable practices** into all State Park facilities, whether through rehabilitation or replacement.

**Employee Compensation - Numerous compensation actions over the past three years, while well-intentioned and appreciated, have resulted in unintended consequences and created significant inequities in the MPS Classification and Salary plan and resulted in salary compaction issues for many MPS employees, particularly managers.**

In 2018, a Salary Equity Adjustment, requested by the MPS and approved by DBM, brought all Rangers, both current and new hires, to a Step 3 pay increment level without a commensurate increase to employees already at Step 3 or higher, **effectively resulting in the elimination of longevity pay for more senior employees.**

In 2019, a DBM-approved and union-negotiated action resulted in all Lead Rangers (Park Services Associate Leads – Grade 15) **being elevated to the same grade as their direct supervisors** (Park Services Supervisors – Grade 16). DBM later created a second Lead Ranger classification at a lower pay grade (15), **resulting in two different pay grades for the same position.**

In 2021, the minimum wage for all state employees, including short-term seasonal employees, increased to \$15/hour, **further compressing the MPS salary scale** with regard to long-term contractual and career classified employees.

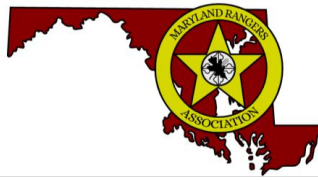
All of the above actions were accomplished in the spirit of raising the level of **compensation** for the professional employees of the Maryland Park Service and bringing it more **in line with the industry standard for professional park operations and maintenance work.** However, these efforts have still fallen short of the level needed to **retain the highest quality and most diverse candidates**, and many are leaving to pursue equally meaningful work with agencies able to provide the type of compensation sought by people supporting a family while also pursuing their passion.

#### **Action Items:**

1. DBM, unilaterally or by legislative mandate, **must resolve the pay disparity related to their error**, when the state collectively bargained with the Maryland Professional Employees Council (MPEC) to implement the Annual Salary Review (ASR) submitted by DNR to provide a one-grade salary adjustment for certain employees, at which time DBM subsequently created two pay grades for the same Lead Ranger classification, one of which was also equivalent to the pay grade for supervisory employees. The requested resolution, in order to avoid rescinding any benefit provided in error to certain employees, is to **apply the same one-grade salary adjustment to the remainder of the classifications utilized by the MPS**, in order to restore the integrity of the salary scale within the unit.

2. DBM should conduct a **comprehensive analysis of comparable professional park positions** in the National Park Service, comparable state park systems, and local park systems (e.g. counties and the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission) to determine the **appropriate compensation and benefit packages required to attract and retain a qualified, diverse MPS workforce.**





3. Commensurate with a previous Salary Equity Adjustment provided to certain MPS employees, which adjusted all salaries in certain classifications to a minimum of Step 3, **all MPS employee salaries should be adjusted** in a corresponding fashion to recognize seniority, as reflected in the longevity Step increments for non-included employees relative to those employees who benefited from the Salary Equity Adjustment.

**Public Safety / Law Enforcement – Due to staffing limitations and competing demands imposed upon the Natural Resources Police (conservation vs. boating vs. public lands), providing a consistent law enforcement presence in State Parks presents challenges for both the NRP and the MPS, especially as those competing demands often occur simultaneously during certain times of the year.**

Given the reliance on effective enforcement, and a consistent public safety presence employing a preventive deterrent-based strategy, to ensure safe and reliable park operations and the successful implementation of management policies (rules), the park management function must be closely and directly integrated with the law enforcement function. In order to effectively manage their parks and meet statutory and ethical obligations for visitor and public safety, **it is imperative that park managers be involved in the management and allocation of law enforcement resources.**

**Action Item:**

The Commission should recommend and formally request an **assessment of the current ability of the Natural Resources Police to provide law enforcement services in State Parks**, and to determine whether adequate resources are being allocated to the Natural Resources Police to allow them to effectively accomplish the dual and distinctly separate missions (conservation enforcement and park enforcement) merged as a result of the law enforcement consolidation implemented in 2005, or whether one or both of those competing elements of the current NRP mission is being compromised, e.g. the inability to provide a dedicated proactive, consistent public safety presence in State Parks vs. a reactive, response-based approach.

**Status as First Responders for Rangers – Despite being certified in multiple emergency response disciplines and routinely responding to a wide range of emergencies in State Parks, Rangers are struggling to receive acknowledgment of their critical role and status as first responders in the context of the state’s emergency response apparatus.**

Rangers routinely respond to a variety of emergencies in State Parks and other areas, in coordination with **police, fire, and EMS, who regularly rely on Rangers** to provide first aid, search and rescue, and other public safety services in undeveloped and often remote settings.

**Rangers are often overlooked** for various benefits afforded to more commonly-recognized first responders like police, fire, and EMS.

**Action Item:**

The Commission should recommend, and the Commissioners should sponsor, **legislation to provide statutory recognition of the status of Maryland Rangers as First Responders**, and amend existing statutes to **codify the inclusion of Maryland Rangers with regard to unique benefits afforded all other First Responders** including, but not limited to, emergency response pay, preferential income tax deductions, and legal presumptions for occupational diseases.

## **HB 727 The Great Outdoors Act.pdf**

Uploaded by: Denise Riley

Position: FAV

**Written Testimony Submitted to the  
Maryland House Environment & Transportation Committee  
HB 727 - Natural Resources - Maryland Park Service and State Parks - Alterations  
(Great Maryland Outdoors Act)  
February 23, 2022**

**SUPPORT**

Chair Barve and members of the committee, on behalf of the more than 20,000 members of the American Federation of Teachers – Maryland (AFT-Maryland), including the Maryland Professional Employees Council (MPEC), which represents the Park Ranger Associates, we ask for a favorable report on HB 727 - Natural Resources - Maryland Park Service and State Parks - Alterations (Great Maryland Outdoors Act).

Park Rangers are and should be recognized as first responders. They are trained for and provide the same types of emergency services as EMTs, police, and fire fighters. Many times, Park Rangers have saved lives due to their level of training and professionalism.

Recognition of their service and training could help fill the large number of vacant positions currently in our state parks. Last year, the Maryland State Park Investment Commission recognized the need for highly qualified personnel to effectively operate the park and visitor services. With current staffing levels, one Park Ranger out on sick leave could mean there are no trained personnel available to operate the park.

Park Rangers are passionate about their work. They keep the parks safe and clean for recreation; promote better mental and physical health; and bring family and friends together in our great outdoors. Park Rangers are stewards of our state's most precious public lands and should be treated with the dignity and respect they deserve.

Again, AFT-Maryland calls for a favorable report for HB 727. Thank you.

Kenya Campbell  
President

# **HB727 Testimony\_FAV\_Preservation Maryland.pdf**

Uploaded by: Eleanor Cowan

Position: FAV

Testimony of Elly Cowan

Director of Government Relations, Preservation Maryland

Before the

House Environment and Transportation Committee

February 23, 2022

Pertaining To: HB727 - Great Maryland Outdoors Act

*Support*

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On behalf of the staff and Board of Directors of Preservation Maryland and our thousands of statewide supporters, we greatly appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on the future of Maryland's state parks and the critical role they play in preserving our state's diverse history.

SUPPORT FOR HOUSE BILL 727, GREAT MARYLAND OUTDOORS ACT

In late 2021, the Maryland General Assembly convened the State Park Investment Commission to explore the challenges associated with the operation, maintenance, staffing and access to Maryland's State Park system – and to identify next steps for improving the parks. The bill before you today is the result of the hard work of that Commission.

Over our 90-year history, Preservation Maryland has had a long-term interest in *preserving, restoring, and expanding* our state parks and protected lands. As such, we are proud to offer our enthusiastic support for HB727 which represents the greatest investment in our State Parks in a generation. This sweeping legislation creates and funds a pathway for a State Park system that addresses needs for acquisition, accessibility, and equity. It seeks to invest in the parks we already have while looking to expand the portfolio to ensure all Marylanders have public access to open space. Preservation Maryland is supportive of the many laudable goals that would be achieved through HB727 but will focus our testimony on the investment in the preservation and maintenance of the vast number of historic and cultural resources in Maryland parks and the expansion to include the diverse histories of underrepresented communities.

## Maintain, Expand & Invest in Existing Resources

As the statewide, nonprofit preservation organization, Preservation Maryland is particularly interested in this issue as the Maryland Park Service (MPS) system and the broader Maryland Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) *protect more historic structures and resources than any other entity in the state* – making their success critical to our mission. Additionally, according to a study previously conducted by MDNR, visiting historic resources was the number one interest of visitors to Maryland state parks – tied only with walking. Well-preserved historic places are not just important to preservationists – they are a priority experience for Marylanders.

According to mobility data collected by Google ([google.com/covid19/mobility](https://www.google.com/covid19/mobility)), visitation to parks in Maryland is currently up more than **134%** against the pre-pandemic baseline. For popular state parks with limited access, constricted public spaces, and few park rangers, this has meant parks turning away guests during many peak visitation weekends. From the Eastern Shore to the foothills of western Maryland, the same story is repeated often.

At the same time, this influx of visitors has left a significant impact on the park resources themselves – from roads to historic sites to pools – park infrastructure requires strategic and significant investment.

The increased visitation, increased federal support, and a desire to preserve diverse history presents a unique opportunity to invest in our state parks – and help address systemic challenges faced by the system. Preservation Maryland believes that the Maryland Great Outdoors Act does just that.

To address the critical maintenance backlog throughout the Parks system, HB727 requires the Department of Natural Resources to conduct a systemwide survey of historical and cultural resources and include an estimation of the restoration costs, and the legislation provides funding to address those needs, including additional staff to be hired to increase the Park Service's capacity to administer and accomplish this monumental undertaking. Simply put, we cannot maintain or preserve what we don't know is there. This is a critical step towards addressing the preservation needs of the many invaluable historic resources in parks across the state.



### Strategically Grow Park Units and Prioritize Accessibility and Inclusion

HB727 would ensure that the state prioritizes the acquisition and development of more accessible state parks to meet a growing population eager to escape to nature and learn about the state's rich history. This includes ensuring decisions related to the location and establishment of new state parks or amenities targets areas identified by the Department of Natural Resources' Park Equity tool as in need of recreational opportunities or would relieve overcrowding in existing parks that have consistently had to close due to capacity restrictions. Additionally, special attention is to be paid to the establishment of state historical parks that preserve or interpret historically underrepresented communities and that speak to the *full story* of Maryland. To that end, HB727 would establish the Freedman's State Historical Park, a park that will preserve and interpret the lives and experiences of Black Marylanders, both before and after the abolition of slavery.

Maryland has an opportunity to make a once in a lifetime investment to make our state parks more accessible and inclusive and to address the critical maintenance backlog. The Great Maryland Outdoors Act provides not only the path forward but also the much-needed funding to accomplish the vision.

Therefore, I respectfully urge a favorable report of HB727.

# **GMOA Sponsor Testimony.pdf**

Uploaded by: Eric Luedtke

Position: FAV

ERIC LUEDTKE  
*Legislative District 14*  
Montgomery County

MAJORITY LEADER

Ways and Means Committee

Chair, Revenues Subcommittee



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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**SPONSOR TESTIMONY**

House Bill 727 - Natural Resources - Maryland Park Service and State Parks - Alterations  
(Great Maryland Outdoors Act)

Chair Barve, Vice Chair Stein, Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee,

Over the July 4th weekend, 2021, Marylanders were starting to come out of the original COVID lockdown. Coronavirus case rates were low, businesses had opened back up, and people began mingling again. To celebrate the holiday, thousands came together and headed to state parks. But instead of spending their time as planned with friends and families, many were turned away as parks around the state had been closed due to overcrowding.

These closures attracted quite a bit of media attention but were not unique. In fact, parks were closed due to overcrowding 292 times in 2020 alone, setting a new record. And while there was certainly an uptick in visits in 2020 due to COVID preventing us from taking part in many of our usual activities, this high number of annual closures was not an outlier. These closures are part of a trend spanning decades and which continued into 2021. Each year, Maryland parks are greeted with record numbers of visitors. Unfortunately, this increase in visits has not been met with an increase in support from the state.

Our state parks today are overcrowded, underfunded, inaccessible to many, and in need of critical repairs. In recognition of these shortcomings of our park system, Speaker Adrienne Jones and Senate President Bill Ferguson created the State Parks Investment Commission last year to assess how to tackle these challenges. I had the pleasure of serving on this Commission and, together with my colleagues, we released a report in December that includes dozens of recommendations that would provide Maryland with a world-class park system. A system that is well-managed, easily accessible, and that provides all Marylanders greater access to greenspaces, trails, water, and the great outdoors. A system that gives each of us the opportunity to connect with our natural world, all while improving our health, quality of life, and economy. Today, I am proud to present House Bill 727, the Great Maryland Outdoors Act, which seeks to implement many of these recommendations and make a generational impact on our state parks.

This legislation will paydown the MPS critical maintenance backlog, require DNR to hire 100 additional employees with special focus on maintenance and acquisitions, direct DNR to

create a Comprehensive Long Range Strategic Plan every 5 years as well as a regular Capital Improvements Plan, create an oversight commission, and more. The ultimate goal of this legislation is to invest in parks to reduce capacity closures and ensure that every community has access to a high quality state park. The Great Maryland Outdoors Act takes a long-term approach to our park system to ensure that we pass down a sustainable system for generations to come.

I thank the Committee for considering this legislation and ask that you support our parks in communities around the state by voting favorable on House Bill 727.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eric Luedtke", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Delegate Eric Luedtke

# **HB 727\_CBF SUPPORT.pdf**

Uploaded by: Erik Fisher

Position: FAV



# CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

*Environmental Protection and Restoration  
Environmental Education*

## **House Bill 727**

Natural Resources - Maryland Park Service and State Parks - Alterations  
(Great Maryland Outdoors Act)

Date: February 23, 2022

To: Environment & Transportation Committee

Position: Support

From: Erik Fisher, AICP, Maryland Land Use Planner

Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **SUPPORTS** HB 727, which addresses serious funding shortfalls for supporting and preserving Maryland's parklands, farms, forests, and open space. These investments will help current and future generations of Marylanders realize a myriad of health and environmental benefits from Maryland's outdoor resources.

### **Parks and open space are critical to restoring the Chesapeake Bay, Maryland's natural treasure.**

The forests, pastures, meadows, and marshes that stretch across the state's open spaces are our most effective natural filters, stopping pollution from fouling rivers, creeks, and the Chesapeake Bay. This natural footprint is essential to protect clean water: each acre of hardened surfaces like rooftops and parking lots is four times more polluting than meadow, and ten times more polluting than forest. Protecting and managing natural lands with park districts and conservation easements allow these landscapes to mature into high-functioning environmental features, provide sites to install pollution-reducing best management practices, and enhance wildlife habitat. For these reasons, under the interstate Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement, Maryland has committed to help restore 235,000 acres of wetlands and protect more than 2 million acres of high-value forest and farmland by 2025. Unfortunately, the Chesapeake Bay Program reports that preservation goals for open space and working lands have not yet been achieved.

### **The State's natural resources promote Marylanders' health and productivity.**

Access to nature directly improves a person's wellbeing. Numerous studies show that contact with the natural world reduces negative health markers, increases creativity, relieves stress, and promotes a more active lifestyle. Open space also provides the opportunity to forage, fish, and develop a nutritious local food system through regenerative agriculture. Nevertheless, the Chesapeake Bay Program reports that Maryland has fallen behind Virginia, New York, and Pennsylvania in the expansion of public access to natural areas and waterways.

### **HB 727 invests so that generations of Marylanders can enjoy the benefits of the state's natural spaces.**

Maryland is the fifth most densely populated state in the nation, and its population continues to increase. Accordingly, state park capital assets are under tremendous strain with record numbers of visitors, while some of Maryland's best remaining natural areas fall to pressure from land development. The investments directed by HB 727 will help clarify and address the backlog of repairs, upgrades, and expansions to these facilities in a manner that recognizes the sensitive natural features and ecological carrying capacity of each tract. This funding will also boost efforts to protect more working farms and forest land.

Maryland Office • Philip Merrill Environmental Center • 6 Herndon Avenue • Annapolis • Maryland • 21403  
Phone (410) 268-8816 • Fax (410) 280-3513

*The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) is a non-profit environmental education and advocacy organization dedicated to the restoration and protection of the Chesapeake Bay. With over 300,000 members and e-subscribers, including over 109,000 in Maryland alone, CBF works to educate the public and to protect the interest of the Chesapeake and its resources.*

**CBF urges the Committee's FAVORABLE report on HB 727.** For more information, please contact Robin Jessica Clark, Maryland Staff Attorney at [rclark@cbf.org](mailto:rclark@cbf.org) and 443.995.8753.



# **HB 727\_CWRP\_Testimony\_Favorable.pdf**

Uploaded by: Isaac Meyer

Position: FAV

**Chesapeake Watershed Restoration Professionals**

**House Bill 727**  
**Natural Resources – Maryland Park Service and State Parks – Alterations**  
***Great Maryland Outdoors Act***

**Position: FAVORABLE**

February 23, 2022

Honorable Kumar Barve  
Chair, Environment and Transportation

Honorable Maggie McIntosh  
Chair, Appropriations

Chair Barve, Chair McIntosh, and members of the Committees,

On behalf of the Chesapeake Watershed Restoration Professionals (CWRP), we strongly support HB 727 – Great Maryland Outdoors Act. CWRP was founded in November of 2020 and represents Maryland professionals whose daily work improves the health of Maryland's waters and our prized Chesapeake Bay. First, we would like to commend Senator Elfreth and Delegate Luedtke for their leadership in assembling stakeholders over the last year to undertake the herculean task of identifying the sources of underinvestment in our State Parks but also presenting a vision for what the future of Maryland state parks. The final product as laid out in SB 541 will bring Maryland's State Parks into the 21<sup>st</sup> century by clearing the critical maintenance backlog, making capital improvements, and requiring all Park Service projects to contribute to the improvement of local water quality.

CWRP would like to raise awareness of two key provisions that underscore our support for the legislation.

First, the bill establishes the Park System Capital Improvements and Acquisition Fund with a one-time \$70 million appropriation. \$5 million of the appropriation is directed to infrastructure projects that mitigate the impact of climate change including areas like stormwater infrastructure. Our members specialize in this work, and we believe this is a critical investment that we can fulfill and support its inclusion in HB 727.

Second, HB 727 requires the recognition of the role forests, trees, and wetlands play in tackling climate change and further requires all Park Service projects to contribute to the improvement of local water quality. CWRP believes this underlying theme sends an important message in recognizing the role our streams play in protecting and improving not only local water quality, but the Chesapeake Bay.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony and we urge a favorable report on HB 727.

Sincerely,

Liam O'Meara  
President  
Chesapeake Watershed Restoration Professionals

## **HB0727 Favorable 2.pdf**

Uploaded by: Jayson Spiegel

Position: FAV

Statement of Jayson L. Spiegel  
HB0727  
Natural Resources – Great Maryland Outdoors Act  
February 23, 2022  
**FAVORABLE**

Dear Chairman Barve and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee:

My name is Jayson Spiegel. I am a Gaithersburg resident (District 17) and retired after 28 years commissioned service in the Army and Army Reserve. I am speaking in my personal capacity as an avid freshwater angler, who frequently fishes for bass and other species from the shores of Maryland's many lakes, ponds, rivers and streams.

Fishing with your family is one of the most memorable experiences available to Maryland residents. It is an inexpensive hobby that teaches children an appreciation for natural resources, patience, analytical skills and conservation. Nothing beats the smile on the face of a child when they catch and release their first fish.

The Great Maryland Outdoors Act will significantly enhance conservation and preservation of Maryland's natural resources. One area that may benefit from the act accessibility to, and repair and maintenance of, the shoreline surrounding bodies of water.

In many instances, it can be hazardous to fish from the shore at public bodies of water where fishing is permitted. It can be hazardous to get to the shoreline and there may be limited level areas to safely stand. The difficulty of getting to the shoreline and then finding a safe place to stand is particularly problematic for young children, as well as anglers who are older or have mobility challenges. It can be particularly challenging for families that want to fish together but must maintain a sufficiently safe distance between themselves to ensure nobody is injured by a hook or rod while casting. Trash, including empty/broken bottles of alcohol, often litter shoreline fishing areas.

Natural resource officials must balance the need to preserve natural growth and topography with the safety of we Marylanders who fish from the shoreline. The Great Maryland Outdoors Act will provide additional resources to enhance the shoreline fishing experience for Maryland families.

For the above reasons, I respectfully request a **favorable report** on HB0727.

Jayson Spiegel  
413 Upshire Circle  
Gaithersburg, MD 20878 (District 17)

# **BaltimoreCounty\_FAV\_HB0727.pdf**

Uploaded by: Joel Beller

Position: FAV



JOHN A. OLSZEWSKI, JR.  
*County Executive*

JOEL N. BELLER  
*Acting Director of Government Affairs*

JOSHUA M. GREENBERG  
*Associate Director of Government Affairs*

MIA R. GOGEL  
*Associate Director of Government Affairs*

**BILL NO.: House Bill 727**

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

**SPONSOR:** Delegate Luedtke

**COMMITTEE:** Environment and Transportation

**POSITION:** **SUPPORT**

**DATE:** February 23, 2022

Baltimore County **SUPPORTS** House Bill 727 – Natural Resources – Maryland Park Service and State Parks – Alterations (Great Maryland Outdoors Act). This legislation would address infrastructure, capacity, and accessibility needs within the Maryland Park service and State parks.

The ability to enjoy outdoor parks and open space is a fundamental right of every Maryland resident. Baltimore County Executive John Olszewski is committed to expanding equitable access to recreational outdoor spaces as he understands the opportunities, health benefits and sense of community they provide. The County has prioritized obtaining recreational facilities and most recently announced a state-of-the-art Ravens themed facility at Northwest Regional Park. No matter their income or zip code, Maryland residents should all have easy access to clean, safe parks. In order to ensure this, it is important that the State addresses infrastructure and accessibility needs within these parks.

House Bill 727 ensures equal access to open spaces by increasing investments to address the needs of Maryland's parks. This includes plans to survey infrastructure and maintenance needs, and develop capital improvement and long-range strategic goals. The legislation also provides employment opportunities for Marylanders by increasing the number of park employees. HB 727 is essential to improving the lives of all Marylanders by providing accessible parks throughout the State.

Accordingly, Baltimore County requests a **FAVORABLE** report on HB 727. For more information, please contact Joel Beller, Acting Director of Government Affairs at [jbeller@baltimorecountymd.gov](mailto:jbeller@baltimorecountymd.gov).

# **HB727\_MDSierraClub\_fav Sign On Letter 23Feb2022.p**

Uploaded by: Josh Tulkin

Position: FAV





*Wednesday, February 23, 2022*

**HB 727 “Natural Resources – Maryland Park Service and State Parks – Alterations (Great Maryland Outdoors Act)”**

**Position: Favorable**

**TO:** Kumar Barve, Chair of the House Environment and Transportation Committee,  
Maggie McIntosh, Chair, House Appropriations Committee, and Committee Members

We, the undersigned 13 organizations representing over 100,000 Maryland members and supporters, are writing in support of HB 727/ SB 541, the Great Maryland Outdoors Act, which delivers a needed infusion of funding for the state parks so vital to Maryland. This bill will provide better parks and recreation experiences for Marylanders by increasing the number of parks, park amenities, and park employees; improving transportation options to parks; creating a strategic planning process to direct increased funding; mitigating climate change through green infrastructure; and improving park equity.

Founded on research provided by the State Parks Investment Commission led by former Governor Glendenning, this bill is built on sound planning and the expressed needs of constituents. Several features of the bill would provide an organizational upgrade, including establishing a Parks and Recreation Commission to provide ongoing support and oversight of the Maryland Park Service. Effective use of state monies would be promoted by data collection, tracking, and evaluation of programs over time that are proposed by this legislation. The comprehensive strategic plan will help the programs to adjust over time to new challenges. Upgrades to online access to information about park availability and amenities available will also be beneficial.

The bill also directly addresses overcrowding and access issues. The funding for acquisition of land for new parks in underserved areas, for more beach access, and for more historical parks will help alleviate the need for more outdoors activity options. The plan to survey, track, and fund park infrastructure, critical maintenance needs, and historical and cultural resources will ameliorate these areas. The funds to provide increased access to recreational bodies of water will increase aquatic opportunities statewide.

Another valued component of the Great Maryland Outdoors Act is the funding of green infrastructure improvements to mitigate climate change. The strengthening of natural systems by using tools such as forest and buffer preservation, support for natural wetlands, and stormwater infrastructure such as rain gardens, permeable surfaces, and native plants should contribute to the long-term health of the parks and all of Maryland.

The bill proposes increased agency collaboration to promote transportation options and increased public access through improved bike trails and walkability measures. This would be of benefit to anyone visiting a park. The increase in the number of employees by 100 and improved salary equity and benefits for park employees should lead to fewer closures and less crowding.

Perhaps the greatest benefit of this bill is the increased access to parks everyone will have in Maryland. The adoption of Universal Design principles will help establish more access to facilities for people with disabilities and seniors. The use of a Park Equity Mapping Tool will promote the placement of new parks in locations where the population and park distribution merit them. The establishment of the Freedman's State Historical Park will share an untold part of Maryland history.

The Great Maryland Outdoors Act has a whole-system approach to improving our park system. It will bring jobs and other economic benefits across the state. Its package of improvements promises broadly shared benefits for Marylanders. We strongly urge a favorable report for this bill.

Sincerely,

Sierra Club Maryland Chapter, Rosa Hance, Chair

Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Robin Clark, Staff Attorney

Audubon Mid-Atlantic, David Curson, Director of Bird Conservation

Maryland Campaign for the Environmental Human Rights Amendment, Nina Cardin, Director

Chesapeake Climate Action Network Action Fund, Victoria Venable, Maryland Director

Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake, Jodi Rose, Executive Director

Prince George's Audubon Society, Ken Cohen, President

Indivisible Howard County, Richard Deutschmann

Safe Skies Maryland, Mark Southerland, Legislative Director

Maryland Legislative Coalition, Monica O'Connor

The Nature Conservancy Maryland/DC Chapter

Maryland Ornithological Society, Kurt Schwartz, Conservation Chair

WISE Women Indivisible Strong Effective

# **HB 727 Great Maryland Outdoors Act -- FAVORABLE.pdf**

Uploaded by: KIMBERLY EGAN

Position: FAV



*One Common Bond | The Horse*  
*One Common Voice | The Maryland Horse Council*

## Testimony of the Maryland Horse Council on HB 727

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

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The Maryland Horse Council (MHC) is a membership-based trade association that represents the state-wide horse industry in Maryland. Our members include horse farms; horse related businesses; equestrian competitors; trainers; individual enthusiasts; equine-assisted therapy programs; and breed, interest, and discipline associations. We represent over 30,000 Marylanders who make their living with horses, or who just own and love them.

MHC supports HB 727 because most riders are recreational riders, and most recreational riders use Maryland's extensive network of multi-use trails.

The horse industry overall has a \$2.4 billion impact on Maryland. Recreational riding alone supports ~5,000 jobs and adds \$268 million in value to the State's economy. The total economic impact of recreational riding in Maryland is \$438 million in 2022 dollars.

We applaud the sponsors for so rapidly taking steps to implement the recommendations of the State Park Investment Commission. Our industry is committed to expanding equine recreational opportunities that are adequately accessible to all populations of Marylanders, including low-income Marylanders, those who lack access to a car, and Marylanders with disabilities. We also applaud Governor Hogan for creating the Office Outdoor Recreation (ORR) to enhance outdoor recreation opportunities and the economic benefits they produce.

Every component of HB 727 will benefit the horse industry, but in particular:

- The new Volunteer Management Program will solve a major challenge that has faced our recreational riders through the years. Trail riding groups are ready, willing, and eager to volunteer for trail maintenance work, but they are often unable effectively to work through the current system for getting approved as a volunteer organization. In addition, trail riding organizations have faced challenges with respect to the mandatory chainsaw training. Taken together, it has been difficult, if not impossible, for trail riders



*One Common Bond | The Horse*  
*One Common Voice | The Maryland Horse Council*

to clear logs and trees that block trails after a storm, or to trim trees to a level sufficiently high to permit riders to pass without getting hit by over-hanging limbs. A coordinated volunteer program dedicated to promoting volunteer opportunities and conducting training will be an immense help.

- The \$80 million Park System Critical Maintenance Fund is essential to repair trails that have eroded, that have large holes, and that have otherwise degraded to the point of being unsafe for users.
- The \$70 million Park System Capital Improvement & Acquisitions Fund is essential to improving the carbon capture capacity of our parks through flood barriers and forest buffers, for improving and expanding multi-use trails, and for acquiring new public land to relieve overcrowding.

Thank you again for sponsoring this important and potentially game changing legislation. We urge the committee to give it a favorable report.

Respectfully submitted,

**THE MARYLAND HORSE COUNCIL**  
(844) MDHORSE (844-634-6773)

# **MD Catholic Conference\_FAV\_HB0727.pdf**

Uploaded by: MJ Kraska

Position: FAV





ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF  
WILMINGTON

**February 23, 2022**

**HB 727**

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

**Environment & Transportation Committee**

**Position: Support**

The Maryland Catholic Conference (“Conference”) represents the public-policy interests of the three Roman Catholic (arch) dioceses serving Maryland: the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the Archdiocese of Washington, and the Diocese of Wilmington.

House Bill 727 addresses infrastructure, capacity, and accessibility needs within the Maryland Park Service and State parks, including establishing systems and processes for surveying infrastructure and critical maintenance needs, increasing the number of Maryland Park Service full-time employees, requiring the Department of Budget and Management to conduct certain staff reviews, and requiring the Department of Natural Resources to develop a certain capital improvement plan and a comprehensive long-range strategic plan

At its core, environmental concerns are about the future of God's creation and the one human family. Such concerns are about protecting both the human environment and the natural environment. They are about stewardship of God's creation and our responsibility to those who come after us. As stewards of God's creation we can live more simply, using the earth's resources wisely, reducing our consumption, working to eliminate pollution and reducing our carbon footprint. Our church teachings regarding environmental stewardship are rich and challenging. Pope Benedict XVI, in his 2010 World Day of Peace message entitled if you want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation, urged us to renew and strengthen *“that covenant between human beings and the environment, which should mirror the creative love of God, from whom we come and towards whom we are journeying”* (no. 1).

The Conference appreciates your consideration and respectfully urges a favorable report for House Bill 727.

# **Anne Arundel County\_FAV\_HB 727.pdf**

Uploaded by: Peter Baron

Position: FAV



February 23, 2022

**House Bill 727**

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

**Environment and Transportation Committee**

**Position: FAVORABLE**

House Bill 727 will make critical, forward-thinking investments in the state park system in order to increase staffing, expand recreational amenities, and improve equity of access.

Anne Arundel County shares the legislature's commitment to preserving our natural resources and supporting and enhancing outdoor recreation opportunities. This commitment has taken on new importance during the pandemic, as public use of and demand for parks and open space has increased dramatically. Our state and local parks have seen a surge of unprecedented crowds throughout the pandemic, which has put stress on park rangers and staff, historical sites, and aging infrastructure. This demand has also highlighted the need to resolve long-standing barriers to park access that some of our communities face.

With nearly 50 active capital projects in its six year plan, the County Department of Recreation and Parks continues to create public spaces that enhance our health and connect us to nature. We are creating better park access for people with disabilities, transforming the idea of a county-wide trail network from a concept to reality, and investing in water access projects. Our goal is to provide a diverse range of accessible recreational facilities and programs to serve the needs of all County residents.

This landmark legislation will preserve the irreplaceable natural, historical, and cultural sites that we all treasure. For these reasons, Anne Arundel County requests a **FAVORABLE** report on HB 727.

## **2.23.2022 Chesapeake Conservancy testimony HB 727.**

Uploaded by: Reed Perry

Position: FAV

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Environmental Stewardship Strategies

February 23, 2022

The Honorable Kumar Barve  
Chair, Environment and Transportation  
Maryland House of Delegates  
251 Taylor House Office Building  
6 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Dana Stein  
Vice Chair, Environment and Transportation  
Maryland House of Delegates  
251 Taylor House Office Building  
6 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chair Barve, Vice Chair Stein and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee,

On behalf of Chesapeake Conservancy, I write to urge your support for the Great Maryland Outdoors Act (HB 727 / SB 541) sponsored by Delegate Eric Luedtke and Senator Sarah Elfreth and to move this bill favorably from committee.

HB 727 responds to the findings of the State Park Investment Commission, a bipartisan and bicameral commission created by the Speaker of the House and the Senate President in 2021 to assess the current and future needs of the Maryland State Park system. Chaired by former Governor Parris Glendening, Senator Elfreth, and Delegate Luedtke, the commission conducted a thorough investigation of Maryland state parks, reviewing challenges related to park capacity, maintenance, staffing, funding, equity and climate change. The commission facilitated several hearings featuring testimony from a large and diverse set of stakeholders. Chesapeake Conservancy was pleased to provide testimony to the commission on two separate occasions on the role of state parks in Maryland's overall conservation efforts and on inclusive visitor engagement at state parks.

The commission's final report highlights the many challenges facing Maryland's state park system but also the many opportunities to improve our parks for the benefit of Maryland residents and visitors today and well into the future. HB 727 responds to these challenges and opportunities by investing in new parks and expanded parks, critical maintenance and operations, and by directing action to improve accessibility and equity in the park system, along with other improvements. This investment comes at a critical moment for Maryland's state parks, many of which are severely underfunded, understaffed and in need of investment and improvement so that they can meet the growing needs of Marylanders for space in which to recreate and enjoy nature.

HB 727 would make substantial changes to Chapter 10 of 2016 which is the statutory reimbursement of diverted transfer tax funding to Program Open Space and related land conservation programs. Notably, the bill would repeal funding directed to Program Open Space stateside and Program Open Space local through Chapter 10 and instead direct that funding to the Park System Capital Improvements and Acquisition Fund (a new fund created by HB 727).

Chesapeake Conservancy serves as co-chair of the Partners for Open Space and we advocate strongly for continued and full funding of Program Open Space and the conservation programs funded through the real estate transfer tax. We strongly opposed the previous diversions away from Program Open Space which amounted to more than \$1 billion dollars in the past two decades. Those diversions directly contributed to a decrease in conservation efforts across the state of Maryland, resulting in less protected open space for Marylanders. However, we acknowledge the urgent and immediate need to invest in Maryland's state parks and the need for this new fund. Importantly, the Park System Capital Improvements and Acquisition Fund would include \$30 million for land acquisition efforts to expand parks and create new parks. Therefore, on this limited basis involving changes to funding that would have otherwise been directed to Program Open Space, we support HB 727 as it affects Chapter 10 of 2016.

The Great Maryland Outdoors Act has been described as a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reinvest in Maryland's state park system, and we echo that sentiment. Marylanders are demanding access to parks and open space like never before, putting a significant strain on existing parks and park facilities. Today, access to parks and greenspace is not equitable: many communities across Maryland are unable to get to parks due to transportation constraints and the location of existing parks. Today we have the unique opportunity to invest in Maryland's park system and make access to parks more equitable so that current and future generations can enjoy and benefit from Maryland's state parks.

Thank you for considering my testimony, and I urge your support for HB 727.

Sincerely,



Joel Dunn  
President and CEO  
Chesapeake Conservancy



## **HB727\_FAV\_Kaboom**

Uploaded by: Sally Dorman

Position: FAV



Position: Support HB 727

February 21, 2022

Dear Chairman Barve and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee,

On behalf of KaBoom, the national nonprofit dedicated to ending playspace inequity, I support HB 727 and commend Delegate Luedtke for her leadership with the State Park's Commission. As we see in our work everyday, playspaces and parks are essential to the health and well-being of kids and communities.

As the national nonprofit focused on ending playspace inequity, KABOOM! encourages all of our partners to consider how they can best make equitable investments in public parks and greenspaces. It is important to address barriers to access, such as transportation, distance, and cost, that have prevented many Black, Indigenous, and People of Color and low-income communities from having meaningful access to recreation and leisure spaces. Additionally, cultural barriers that have prevented BIPOC residents from feeling a sense of belonging in these spaces must be addressed through community outreach, participatory planning/design, and culturally responsive programming--among other solutions.

HB 727 is a starting-point for facilitating these conversations and investments so we respectfully urge a favor report on HB 727 and look forward to working with Delegate Luedtke and the Committee as you work to ensure Maryland's parks are resourced with a lens of equity.

Thank you,

Sally Dorman  
Director of Strategic Initiatives  
KaBoom  
[SDorman@kaboom.org](mailto:SDorman@kaboom.org)  
301-641-3789

Spaces to play.  
Sparks for Change.

## **HB 727 FAV MARBIDCO**

Uploaded by: Stephen McHenry

Position: FAV



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*Mary Shank Creek, Chair / Stephen R. McHenry, Executive Director*

## TESTIMONY STATEMENT

**BILL:** **House Bill 727** (Natural Resources - Maryland Park Service and State Parks - Alterations (Great Maryland Outdoors Act))

**COMMITTEE:** **House Environment and Transportation**

**DATE:** **February 23, 2022**

**POSITION:** **Support**

The Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO) supports House Bill 727, which among several features accelerates four years of statutory funding (at \$2.5 annually) for the **Next Generation Farmland Acquisition Program** into a single distribution in FY 2024 of \$10 million. MARBIDCO appreciates the support of the important program which now has two important components (and a third one is potentially in development).

The Next Generation Farmland Acquisition Program (Next Gen Program) was established by MARBIDCO to help qualified young or beginning farmers who have trouble entering or staying in the agricultural profession because of relatively high farmland costs and a lack of access to adequate financial capital to purchase farmland. The Next Gen Program is a relatively speedy farmland conservation easement (or option) purchase program that is designed to help facilitate the transfer of farmland to a new generation of farmers, while at the same time, effectively helping to preserve the subject agricultural land from future development.

The Next Gen Program is an important tool in the financial programs toolbox that allows MARBIDCO to help young or beginning farmers who need access to good quality farmland. The Next Gen Program permits MARBIDCO to provide a young or beginning farmer with the money needed to make a large down-payment on a farm, in order to meet the equity contribution and projected cash flow requirements of a commercial lender, which then permits the lender to make a loan to help finance the balance of a farm purchase. An additional benefit of this program is that the farms that are being purchased are being put on a path to being permanently preserved.

Since the launch of the original Next Gen Program in FY 2018, MARBIDCO has received a total of \$12,231,250 in appropriations from the State of Maryland, (with \$2.5 million received annually, except in FY 2021 there was a small pandemic-related reduction of \$268,750). In FY 2023, \$2.5 million is budgeted in the Dedicated Purpose Account for the Next Gen Program (this for the first time, rather than in MDA's budget allowance).



The Next Gen Program is generally designed to provide a “beginner farmer” (see definition below\*) with the money needed for a down-payment towards a farm purchase, while the subject farmland is put on a path to becoming permanently preserved. At settlement, the Next Gen farmer is awarded an “Option Purchase”, where they enter into an Option Agreement with MARBIDCO and receive an Option Purchase amount (at 51% FMV of the land) to be used as the farm purchase down-payment. (Eligible farm properties must be at least 50 acres in size, unless they are contiguous to already preserved land, then they can be smaller.)

*\*A Beginner Farmer is defined as one who:*

- *Does not own a farm or (or currently owns less than 20 acres of agricultural land); **and***
- *Has not operated a farm or ranch as a principal operator for more than 10 years; **and***
- *Has at least one year of farming experience or has completed a qualified farm management training program that includes substantial fieldwork experience (must be documented in an appropriate fashion); **and***
- *Expects to substantially participate in the farm operation on the subject property.*

The Option Agreement allows the Next Gen farmer a period of several years to sell the permanent easement to a rural land preservation program (such as MALPF, Rural Legacy, a county program, etc.) Typically, once the Next Gen farmer has received an offer to sell the permanent easement, MARBIDCO will terminate and release the Option and receive a repayment amount equivalent to the original Option Purchase Price amount (plus an additional 3% admin fee collected), and the Next Gen farmer is able to retain the remaining amount of money from the permanent easement sale.

In FY 2020, MARBIDCO established a variant of the original program called the **Small Acreage Next Generation Farmland Acquisition Program (SANG)** to help qualified Next Gen farmers purchase smaller farm properties - between 10 to 49 acres in size. Under the SANG program, MARBIDCO awards the SANG farmer with funds for a farm purchase down-payment via an outright “Easement Purchase”, where the applicant agrees to permanently preserve the property under a deed restricted conservation easement in exchange for these funds.

Under both versions of the program, once the permanent easement is on track to be settled, MARBIDCO assigns the easement to a “Permanent Easement Holder”, since MARBIDCO does not hold or administer permanent conservation easements. (MARBIDCO only holds temporary easements.)

### **Summary Next Generation Program Statistics\***

- Total Projects Funded: **33** (30 Original Next Gen and 3 SANG)
- Total Farmland Acres Preserved: **3,080 acres**
- Total Dollar Amount for Easement or Option Purchases Made So Far: **\$9.0 million**

*\*Does not include pending project applications.*

### **What Does the Future Hold for the Next Gen Program?**

The demand for the **original Next Gen Program** has been relatively steady averaging approximately 8 to 10 applications per year. (Not all applicants are able or willing to complete the process, and some have actually withdrawn their applications after receiving approval.) MARBIDCO expects this trend in the number of applications received to continue going forward.

The demand for the **Small Acreage Next Gen Program (SANG)** appears to be increasing as the word about the new program spreads. The volume of inquiries received in recent months has picked up steadily. MARBIDCO expects the number of SANG applications to increase over time and the demand for SANG projects could mirror that of the original Next Gen Program.

The Committee will also be interested to know that there is also a new urban farmer-focused variation of the Next Gen Program that is currently under development (for properties under 3 to 5 acres in size located in urban areas). MARBIDCO is seriously considering implementing such a program recognizing the need to help urban farmers gain long-term access to land but to also preserve the land and provide a benefit to the community. MARBIDCO has held meetings recently with three land trusts in the Baltimore metro area to see if establishing an **Urban Farmer Next Gen Program** would be feasible for launch in the near future. Farmland preservation in urban settings holds certain challenges not experienced in rural areas, particularly given the fact that urban land trusts do not hold or administer permanent conservation easements in the same manner that rural land trusts do.

MARBIDCO is exploring the feasibility of offering a program in which it would work with both qualified farmers and urban land trusts to finance the purchase of farm-appropriate parcels of land in urban areas which would be owned by the land trust and leased at little cost to Next Gen urban farmers under a long-term arrangement. Under a ground lease model, the land trust owns the land, and the farmer owns the improvements on the land. By allowing the certainty that is provided by a longer-term land lease, the farmer is incentivized to make, and is able to own the improvements, made to the property. Therefore, he or she has an equity stake in the enterprise and can recoup his or her investment in improving the land and purchasing agricultural facilities later if needed (including soil conditioning, water/irrigation, hoop houses, etc.) By having the land trust own the land (the ground only), the land trust can ensure the land is not developed and remains as a community benefit. MARBIDCO expects to reach a conclusion concerning the feasibility of this approach in the near future.

**As such, MARBIDCO respectfully requests a Favorable Report for House Bill 727.**

*MARBIDCO Contact: Steve McHenry, 410.267.6807*

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*MARBIDCO was established by the Maryland General Assembly 15 years ago to help enhance the sustainability and profitability of the State's agricultural and resource-based industries to help bolster rural economies, support locally produced food and fiber products, and preserve working farm and forest land. MARBIDCO is a nimble, quasi-public financial intermediary organization which has a mission to serve exclusively the commercial farming, forestry, and seafood industries of Maryland. Assisting young and beginning farmers are a special focus for MARBIDCO, as is farm operation diversification (through value added processing activities). Commercial urban farming has also become a focus of MARBIDCO's efforts.*

*In delivering its financing programs, MARBIDCO works cooperatively with commercial banks and farm credit associations, as well as a host of federal, State, regional and local government agencies, and universities. Since 2007, MARBIDCO has approved 1056 financings totaling nearly \$80 million for food and fiber business projects located in all of Maryland's counties (including Baltimore City) – and in the process has leveraged more than \$170 million in commercial lender financing. For more information about MARBIDCO's programs, please visit: [www.marbidco.org](http://www.marbidco.org).*

# **Friends of MD State Parks Testimony- Great Marylan**

Uploaded by: Tim Casey

Position: FAV



**Friends of Maryland State Parks Foundation**  
*is a statewide, independent, all-volunteer, citizen 501 (c) 3 organization.*  
*We are dedicated to **preserve, protect, enhance, and advocate** for our state parks.*

## **Friends of Maryland State Parks Written Testimony Great Maryland Outdoors Act SB541 & HB727**

### **Friends Vision for Maryland State Parks:**

Since 1906 Maryland State Parks have enhanced quality of life ideals by promoting health, safety, education, environmental stewardship, physical fitness, family enjoyment, and the general welfare of the public. Our parks' natural and recreational resources and cultural heritage should be sustained now and for all succeeding generations. We believe our park system should be the best and aspire to be a "National Model"<sup>1</sup>.

### **Great Maryland Outdoors Act:**

The Friends fully and enthusiastically support this landmark, comprehensive, bi-partisan, cross-filed legislation. It is holistically and historically transformational for Maryland's State Parks System. The reasons the Friends strongly encourage passing SB541 & HB727 are as follow:

#### **Strategic Positioning: Parks & Recreation Commission**

This Commission provides oversight and transparency through management control of the objectives of this legislation. It requires "best practice processes" of a Park Service Comprehensive Strategic Master Plan and Independent Expertise to review and advise on the Plan's goals and measures the results expected and achieved. This is an effective and efficient closed-loop system.

#### **Access for All: Recreation, Culture, Historic, Diversity, and Equality of Access**

- Creates and expands Land Acquisition of new and existing State Parks by allocating \$60M to improve expanded Recreation, Cultural & Historic Preservation, Diversity, and Equality of Access to meet the high-quality experience all Maryland citizens statewide deserve.
- Increases the capacity to offer Water-based Recreation Opportunities to meet citizen demand.
- Ensures Design Principles to effectively accommodate persons w/ disabilities and seniors.
- Focuses on Transportation, Connectivity, and Access to and w/in State Parks in response to the growth in attendance, doubling in the last decade to 20 million visitors.
- Reduces w/ the intent to Eliminate Closures due to continued growth in visitor demand.
- Reduces Park Degradation due to Overcrowding.
- Preserves and interprets the story of Black Marylanders and for the underserved, minorities, and other underrepresented communities.
- Authorizes the establishment of a new Freedman's State Park, a needed historical preservation connection to Black Marylanders.

#### **Current State Park System: Human & Natural Resources, Buildings & Facilities, Roads & Parking**

- Increases Rangers and Park Staff by 100, which has grown by only 4.6% over the last decade.
- Increases Critical Maintenance funding by \$80M to begin reducing the backlog.
- Increases Capital Improvements funding by \$70M for long-delayed projects.

#### **Human Resources Management: Rangers, Park Maintenance Staff**

- Requires timely reviews of Organizational Staffing and Pay Equity.
- Provides Park Staff w/ Emergency Services Responder Designation for occupational benefits and protections recognized as commensurate w/ their job requirements.

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<sup>1</sup> Reference is the 2007 Maryland State Parks Funding Study, available upon request.





**Friends of Maryland State Parks Foundation**  
*is a statewide, independent, all-volunteer, citizen 501 (c) 3 organization.*  
*We are dedicated to **preserve, protect, enhance, and advocate** for our state parks.*

## **Friends of Maryland State Parks Written Testimony** **Great Maryland Outdoors Act SB541 & HB727**

### Good Organizational Systems:

- Recognizes and fosters the need for Sustainable Ecological Practices related to water quality, energy use, use of natural resources, and climate change-related resiliency.
- Recognizes and encourages Design Principles in Interpretation and Programming explaining natural and cultural resources, and enhancing equity in access.
- Implements the use of best practice Asset Management and Evaluation Systems for inventory, project management, project prioritization, and facility conditions assessments.
- Implements a strategically designed Volunteer Management System for 1000's of volunteers.

**Quality of Life Benefits:** State Parks improve citizens' quality of life<sup>2</sup>, through increased property values, clean air and water, and offset climate change and pollution. When surveyed and polled, citizens continue to rate state parks very high in natural and historic/cultural resources, conservation, family values, and healthy lifestyle through recreation opportunities.

**Economic Benefits:** State parks are a major contributor to the economy<sup>3</sup>.

In 2021 it is estimated, at a minimum, state parks generated:

- \$50+ million in taxes & \$17+ million in visitor fees;
- \$25 to \$1 return on investment & \$1.3 billion in economic impact<sup>4</sup>;
- over 13,000 Full-Time Equivalent Jobs.

### **Volunteers:**

5000 Volunteers and all the individual state parks Friends groups across the state have donated over 200,000 hours each year valued at over \$5.7 million<sup>5</sup> and will be strategically managed.

- Skilled volunteers provide training and expertise in many highly technical areas.
- Volunteers provide diversity in the state park workforce.
- Volunteers provide unique perspectives, valuable insights, and can be some of the best advocates for parks and communities.
- Volunteer hours and numbers have long been significantly underreported due to a lack of up-to-date reporting software, and a lack of full-time volunteer and partnership coordinators in both parks and headquarters offices.

*Respectfully Submitted,*

*Mel Poole, President, keeper1916@comcast.net*

*Tim Casey, Secretary, 17 Lochwynd Court Phoenix, MD 21131*

*443 801 6272 tjwcasey@comcast.net*

*Friends Website <http://friendsofmdparks.org/>*

<sup>2</sup> Multiple Goucher polls since 2013, the 2016 MD State Parks Strategic Investment Plan (published in December 2016 & available upon request) and ongoing, continuous Park Service surveys.

<sup>3</sup> 2010 Maryland State Parks Economic Impact & Visitor Study published in March 2011. Numbers are estimated for 2021 & non-pandemic inflated.

<sup>4</sup> Maryland Outdoor Recreation Economic Commission Final Report December 2019. Park Service budget is .00115 of the state operating budget.

<sup>5</sup> Reference is a highly conservative estimate using actual data from Jerusalem Mill, Cunningham, & Gambrills State Parks, & the non-profit IndependentSector.org & U of MD School of Public Policy for MD hourly volunteer rate of \$28.54. The calculation is available upon request.

# **HB 727\_FWA\_MML.pdf**

Uploaded by: Angelica Bailey

Position: FWA



## Maryland Municipal League

*The Association of Maryland's Cities and Towns*

# TESTIMONY

February 23, 2022

**Committee:** House Environment & Transportation

**Bill:** \_\_\_\_\_ HB 727 – Natural Resources – Maryland Park Service and State Parks – Alterations (Great Maryland Outdoors Act)

**Position:** Support with Amendment

**Reason for Position:**

The Maryland Municipal League supports House Bill 727 with amendment.

This bill would in part change how Maryland Park Service (MPS) is funded in a way that significantly impacts municipal Program Open Space funding. Specifically, this bill creates a Park System Capital Improvements and Acquisition Fund and authorizes \$60 million to be transferred from Program Open Space (POS) to that Fund. It also repeals transfer tax appropriations of \$90 million into POS, resulting in a loss of \$23.8 million to local governments from FY 2033 – FY 2031.

MML appreciates the goal of this bill to support capital improvements on park lands and assist land acquisition for new parks. However, local governments rely heavily on Program Open Space for our own recreation and open space development. POS is already in high demand, with all 157 municipalities and 24 counties eligible to apply for \$77 million in FY 2022. Many applicants are denied or do not receive the full funding they requested. Current POS funding is already stretched thin; we cannot afford depletion.

We understand that the Governor's proposed fiscal 2023 budget provides for \$30 million to be paid directly into the Dedicated Purpose Account designated for POS. But that budget isn't final, and POS still loses significant funding under this draft.

MML requests amendments that restructure the funding sources so that POS is untouched. With these amendments, the League would respectfully request a favorable report.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:**

1212 West Street, Annapolis, Maryland 21401

410-268-5514 | 800-492-7121 | FAX: 410-268-7004 | [www.mdmunicipal.org](http://www.mdmunicipal.org)

Scott A. Hancock

Angelica Bailey

Bill Jorch

Justin Fiore

Executive Director

Director, Government Relations

Director, Research and Policy Analysis

Manager, Government Relations

# **Support of HB 727 - Natural Resources - Maryland P**

Uploaded by: Colby Ferguson

Position: FWA





# Maryland Farm Bureau, Inc.

3358 Davidsonville Road • Davidsonville, MD 21035 • (410) 922-3426

February 23, 2022

To: Senate Budget & Taxation Committee  
From: Maryland Farm Bureau, Inc.

Re: **Support of HB 727 - Natural Resources - Maryland Park Service and State Parks - Alterations (Great Maryland Outdoors Act)**

On behalf of our member families, I submit this written testimony in support of HB 727 with 2 amendments. This comprehensive bill addresses infrastructure, capacity, and accessibility needs within the Maryland Park Service and State parks, including establishing systems and processes for surveying infrastructure and critical maintenance needs, increasing the number of Maryland Park Service full-time employees, requiring the Department of Budget and Management to conduct certain staff reviews, and requiring the Department of Natural Resources to develop a capital improvement plan and a comprehensive long-range strategic plan.

Included in this bill is more funding for the Maryland Agland Preservation Foundation. Also in this bill is the possible use of the Program Open space payback funding. Maryland Farm Bureau supports the repayment of these funds and seeks to see some of these funds to cover the cost for the Urban Ag Water and Power Infrastructure Fund that is being established in HB 855. Also, we would like to see funding go to the Department of Natural Resource - Wildlife Services Division to assist with proper wildlife habitat maintenance on the state's parks, forests, and wildlife management areas.

## **Maryland Farm Bureau Policy:**

We support grant programs to provide infrastructure for urban farms. We urge Program Open Space revenues that were diverted to the General Fund to be repaid. We support using a portion of these repaid funds to be used to increase wildlife management in the state. This could include state cost share for vegetative fencing/sacrificial crops and wildlife fencing. We recommend that the larger share of open space funds be used for maintenance of present state-owned land rather than the acquisition of new land. We urge diverting a portion of the open space funds to be used for managing wildlife on state owned land.

## **Maryland Farm Bureau Amendments:**

#1: If this bill is to use the Program Open Space payback funds, we would like the Urban Agriculture Water and Power Infrastructure Grant Fund and program to be included at \$2,000,000 in the FY23 or FY24 budget.

#2: We would like to see dedicated funds appropriated to maintain the wildlife more properly in the state parks, forests and wildlife management areas at \$500,000/year for 4 years starting in FY24.

## **MARYLAND FARM BUREAU SUPPORTS HB 727 WITH TWO AMENDMENTS**

Colby Ferguson  
Director of Government Relations

*For more information contact Colby Ferguson at (240) 578-0396*

## **HB727 - Natural Resources - Maryland Park Service**

Uploaded by: Dakota Matthews

Position: FWA



John Hartline, Chair

50 Harry S. Truman Parkway • Annapolis, MD 21401  
Office: 410-841-5772 • Fax: 410-841-5987 • TTY: 800-735-2258  
Email: [rmc.mda@maryland.gov](mailto:rmc.mda@maryland.gov)  
Website: [www.rural.maryland.gov](http://www.rural.maryland.gov)  
Charlotte Davis, Executive Director

Testimony in Support with amendments of  
House Bill 727 - Natural Resources - Maryland Park Service and State Parks - Alterations (Great Maryland  
Outdoors Act)  
House Environment and Transportation  
February 23, 2022

**The Rural Maryland Council supports with amendments House Bill 727 - Natural Resources - Maryland Park Service and State Parks - Alterations (Great Maryland Outdoors Act).** The Great Maryland Outdoors Act will benefit Maryland's agricultural and land preservation programs by ensuring additional resources for the preservation of additional land through programs such as the Rural Legacy Program, Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF), and the Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO). This legislation will replace and accelerate the current repayment schedule for previous diversions of funds from Program Open Space.

Program Open Space has shown success in preserving Maryland's land. According to Forever Maryland, there are about 1.8 million acres of preserved land in Maryland. The DNR State Land Inventory makes up over a quarter of that land with just under 500,000 acres. MALPF is the second largest preserver, preserving about 340,000 acres or 19%. The additional funding will allow for the transition of farms to the next generation, increased recreational and economic opportunities in local communities, and the preservation of contiguous uninterrupted forestland. As the pandemic proved, our state and local parks are more popular and necessary than ever. The preservation of land also helps with the stewardship of the land by allowing better maintenance and care of the land. For example, being able to monitor and control the intrusion of invasive species or being able to manage storm waters. Controlling these factors that can harm the land keep it healthy and usable for the future.

Stateside and localside Program Open Space are also important economic drivers in Rural Maryland. Enhanced recreational opportunities will bring in additional visitors to Rural Maryland, impacting and enhancing local economies. According to *Economic Impact of Tourism in Maryland*, a report conducted by Tourism Economics, Maryland had 42.1 million visitors in 2019 who spent \$18.6 billion in the State and generated 2.6 billion in state and local taxes. We support efforts to enhance our community parks and playgrounds but ask that the \$60 million transfer of funds for State land acquisition under Program Open Space be reduced or eliminated.

There are equity issues across the State relating to state parks and available open spaces. Along with Baltimore City, both Wicomico and Kent County lack state park facilities. The Maryland Department of Natural Resources in partnership with the University of Maryland School of Public Health created the "MD Park Equity Mapper" to show the equity rates of access to public lands across the State. This was done by accounting for factors such as walkability, population, race, age, and distance to public park space. This map shows low equity in rural areas such as parts of western and southern Maryland and the State's eastern shore. While rural areas have less population and more land, this does not equate to land that is available or accessible for recreation or public use. Many Maryland residents that live near the State's waters, whether it is the Bay, a lake or river, also have no way of accessing the nearby waters. By preserving land and expanding parks across the State, these equity issues can be addressed, and all Marylanders can have access to public parks. The Rural Maryland Council respectfully requests your favorable with amendments support of HB 727.

*The Rural Maryland Council (RMC) is an independent state agency governed by a nonpartisan, 40-member board that consists of inclusive representation from the federal, state, regional, county and municipal governments, as well as the for-profit and nonprofit sectors. We bring together federal, state, county and municipal government officials as well as representatives of the for-profit and nonprofit sectors to identify challenges unique to rural communities and to craft public policy, programmatic or regulatory solutions.*

# **HB0727-ET\_MACo\_SWA.pdf**

Uploaded by: Dominic Butchko

Position: FWA



## House Bill 727

### *Natural Resources - Maryland Park Service and State Parks - Alterations (Great Maryland Outdoors Act)*

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**  
**WITH AMENDMENTS**

To: Environment and Transportation and  
Appropriations Committees

Date: February 23, 2022

From: Dominic J. Butchko

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS HB 727 WITH AMENDMENTS**. The bill would make broad and historic investments in Maryland's State Parks to improve service and accessibility. Among the funding changes in HB 727 is an alteration to repayment of local-side park funding – **MACo urges an amendment to remedy a worrisome diversion of these funds, and to expand on collaborative elements already in the bill.**

State parks are a proven asset in growing healthy communities. They complement the various county park systems, providing leisure space, recognition and reflection of historical events, and tools for economic development. Active and healthy spaces add to a high quality of life for Marylanders.

During the great recession, several areas of state government were forced to make drastic cuts to their operating budgets. One major change was a diversion of funds away from local Program Open Space to help support state parks. Fast forward to the global pandemic, where demand for parks surged, and this unwise short-term solution has been exposed as a poor long-term policy. While HB 727 proposes a wholesale realignment of park funding and payback, the window is wide open to remedy this weak link in park support. **Amendments could stabilize and enhance state parks funding from the General Fund, and still reinstate the traditional local one-half share of Program Open Space.**

Under HB 727, in establishing the Freedman's State Historical Park, the State will be undertaking an innovative partnership model first implemented between federal and state parks. Counties urge that this provision be expanded to encourage more partnership parks, particularly in those few counties still lacking a state park, or where underserved populations can be more effectively reached.

Sections 9-207 and 9-503 of HB 727 draw particular concern for counties, especially starting on page 27. These sections would establish new and far-reaching worker's compensation presumptions for various classes of county parks employees. MACo has concerns with both the presumption and how germane this section is to the broader bill. According to the fiscal note:

"...local government expenditures increase, potentially significantly beginning in fiscal 2023 to pay for workers' compensation benefits, due to the bill's expansion of the State's occupational disease presumptions (provision 11), to the extent local government employees qualify as park services associates, forest rangers, park rangers, or wildlife rangers."



The financial implications of the presumption set by HB 727 would be significant for local governments. Not only would HB 727 include a diagnosis of Lyme disease, heart disease, hypertension, or lung disease as a presumed occupational disease, but it would also include leukemia or prostate, rectal, throat, multiple myeloma, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, brain, testicular, bladder, kidney or renal cell, or breast cancer that is caused by contact with a toxic substance that the individual has encountered as a direct result of their work. Additionally, these conditions may include indefinite or co-diagnoses that would also be covered as workers' compensation under HB 727. While the Commission whose work evolved into this legislation addressed a variety of staffing concerns, they surely have not fully explored the medical and legal ramifications of such broad changes.

**MACo urges the committee to remove these provisions of the bill, and if suitable, to ask the Joint Committee on Pensions to study their State and local long-term fiscal and administrative costs.**

HB 727 makes sensible investments in the state parks system and its next steps. Amidst these elements, amendments to the local funding and park partnerships could make a productive bill better, as part of a comprehensive approach to public recreation across Maryland. Accordingly, MACo urges the Committee to issue a **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** report for HB 727.

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# **Forever MD - HB727 - Great MD Outdoors Act - Feb 1**

Uploaded by: Josh Hastings

Position: FWA



**FOREVER**  
MARYLAND

*Enhancing and Advancing Land Conservation*

**Board of Directors**

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Tricia Clarke  
*Director of Meetings*  
Josh Hastings  
*Program & Policy Director*  
Dina Lansinger  
*Keep Maryland Beautiful Grants Coordinator*

**Date:** February 18, 2022  
**Bill Number:** **HB 727 - Natural Resources - Maryland Park Service and State Parks - Alterations (Great Maryland Outdoors Act)**  
**Committee:** House – Environment and Transportation  
**Position:** Support with Amendment

Forever Maryland supports (with amendment), **HB 727 - Natural Resources - Maryland Park Service and State Parks - Alterations (Great Maryland Outdoors Act)** for the purpose of improving Maryland’s parks and recreation opportunities, accessibility, and greenspace acquisition and management.

This bill comes out of recommendations from the 2021 State Park Investment Commission. This Commission was to make recommendations on the need for new parks in “recreational deserts,” determine the level of accessibility to current parks, make recommendations regarding overcrowding in Maryland State parks, determine the levels of operating funding and staff for existing State parks, and to evaluate the need for capital funding to provide a high-quality experience to park visitors.

Among other things, this bill seeks to have the State: evaluate the condition of state parks; take inventory of all state land managed by the Department of Natural Resources; develop a maintenance project prioritization process; create a \$80M Park System Critical Maintenance Fund; have the Department of Budget and Management initiate a Park Service salary review; create a Parks and Recreation Commission to provide oversight of the Park Service; and have the Department of Natural Resources update the comprehensive long-range strategic plan every five years where it shall evaluate underserved and disadvantaged communities’ interactions of park land and greenspace.

Furthermore, the State shall create a \$70M park system Capital Improvements and Acquisition Fund where \$5M shall be used for infrastructure projects that mitigate the effects of climate change, \$5M for historic preservation, \$20M for transportation improvements, \$10M for increasing water access, and \$30M for land acquisition costs.

Forever Maryland generally supports the recommendations set out within this bill and, speaking on behalf of Maryland’s numerous local land trusts, **requests the following amendment to help address the immense problem of insufficient OAG staffing:**

5–2A–02. (3) THE STAFF POSITIONS REQUIRED UNDER PARAGRAPH (1) OF THIS 12 SUBSECTION SHALL INCLUDE: (I) FIVE POSITIONS IN THE ENGINEERING AND CONSTRUCTION UNIT; (II) **TWO POSITIONS IN THE LAND ACQUISITION AND PLANNING UNIT; (III) THREE POSITIONS WITHIN THE OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL FOR REVIEW OF EASEMENT AND LAND ACQUISITION PROJECTS; AND (IV) ONE VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT PROGRAM COORDINATOR.**

If further information is requested, please contact the organization’s Program and Policy Director, Josh Hastings, at 410-251-5268 or [Josh@ForeverMaryland.org](mailto:Josh@ForeverMaryland.org).

We respectfully request a favorable report with the included amendment.

**FOREVER MARYLAND**

2331 Rock Spring Road | Forest Hill, MD 21050 | 410-251-5268 | [www.ForeverMaryland.org](http://www.ForeverMaryland.org)

# **HB727 MACPRA Position Great MD Outdoors 2-21-22.pd**

Uploaded by: Steve Miller

Position: FWA



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





## MARYLAND ASSOCIATION OF COUNTY PARK & RECREATION ADMINISTRATORS (MACPRA)

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.*

## **HB 727 MD Park Service and State Parks (Luedtke) E**

Uploaded by: Barbara Wilkins

Position: INFO

LARRY HOGAN  
*Governor*

BOYD K. RUTHERFORD  
*Lieutenant Governor*



DAVID R. BRINKLEY  
*Secretary*

MARC L. NICOLE  
*Deputy Secretary*

## **HOUSE BILL 727 Natural Resources – Maryland Park Service and State Parks – Alterations (Luedtke)**

### **STATEMENT OF INFORMATION**

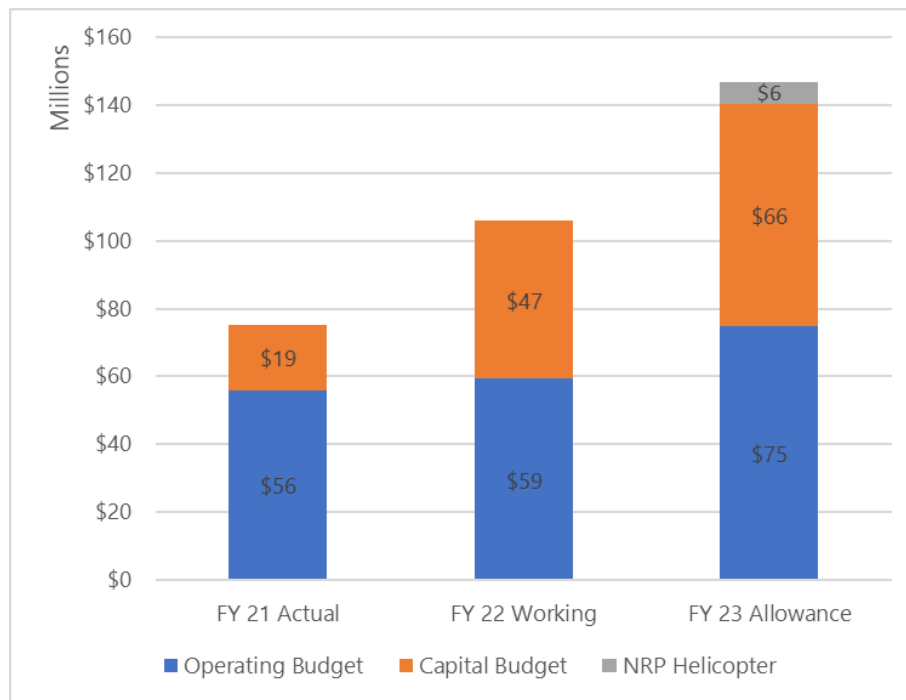
**DATE:** February 23, 2022

**COMMITTEE:** House Environment & Transportation

**SUMMARY OF BILL:** HB 727, in part, establishes a Park System Critical Maintenance Fund and mandates a General Fund appropriation in FY 2024 in the amount of \$80 million; establishes a Park System Capital Improvements and Acquisition Fund and mandates a General Fund appropriation in FY 2024 in the amount of \$70 million; requires the Department of Natural Resources to add 100 full-time classified employees to the Park Service by July 1, 2024 and dictates a specified number of these new employees to specific units; requires the Department of Budget and Management to conduct a staff adequacy review report every two years for the Park Service, as well as a salary review every three years for the Park Service; requires that Park Service Associates, Forest Rangers, Park Rangers, and Wildlife Rangers be recognized as Emergency Services Personnel and provides them with enhanced workers' compensation and tax benefits; establishes a nine member, legislative and Executive Parks and Recreation Commission to provide oversight of the Park Service and be staffed by the Department of Legislative Services; modifies the repayment and dedication of funds previously transferred from the transfer tax to the General Fund and modifies the dedication of funds; and expresses legislative intent authorizing the Governor by June 30, 2022 to transfer \$60 million from Program Open Space state land acquisition program to the Park System Capital Improvements and Acquisition Fund created herein. Effective July 1, 2022.

**EXPLANATION:** The FY 2023 operating budget allowance for the Maryland Parks Service is \$74.7 million – a twenty year high. The FY 2023 capital development allocation for parks from transfer tax revenues is \$46.9 million. This is supplemented by \$25 million in critical maintenance funding in the Dedicated Purpose Account, thereby allocating a total of \$146.6 million for parks in the FY 2023 budget. The parks budget has grown 71% since the beginning of the Administration's tenure.

## TOTAL BUDGET FOR THE PARKS SERVICE



The Administration has been committed to repaying the \$242.2 million in Program Open Space transfer tax revenues that was raided by prior Administrations – \$98.5 has been repaid, including \$30.5 million in the FY 2023 budget allowance. The legislation accelerates the remaining repayments through FY 2031 to FY 2024 (\$184 million), and FY 2025 (\$2.7 million) and dedicates or realigns those funds to specific programs, including:

- MARBIDO \$10 million
  - In FY 2025, MARBIDCO is allocated an additional \$2.7 million
- MALPF \$18 million
- Rural Legacy \$ 5 million
- Park System Capital Maintenance Fund \$80 million
- Capital Improvements and Acquisition Fund \$70 million

Establishing the Park Service Capital Maintenance Fund and Capital Improvements and Acquisition Fund as non-lapsing special funds allows the monies allocated in FY 2024 to remain in the Funds, regardless of how long it takes to spend down the mandated amounts and despite the provision that the \$80 million in the Parks System Critical Maintenance Fund must be spent before July 1, 2026. A more nuanced analysis of how quickly this funding can realistically be spent is recommended.

The FY 2023 Budget allowance for Park Service staffing has 261 full-time classified positions and 296 contractual positions. The bill requires the addition of 100 full-time classified positions by July 1, 2024, including: five positions in the Engineering and Construction unit; five positions in the Land Acquisition and planning unit; and one Volunteer Management Program Coordinator. Again, to recruit and hire 100 additional positions is dependent upon many factors outside the control of the agency, including current job market realities – a longer phase-in to ramp up staffing is recommended. Further, the bill requires the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) to conduct a staff adequacy review of the Park

Service every two years (no due date) and a staff salary review of the Park Service every three years (no due date), both of which should precede the mandate to hire 100 full-time classified positions. The extent to which staffing is increased should be better informed; the staff adequacy review and salary reviews are key elements in determining staffing needs.

**For additional information, contact Barbara Wilkins at  
(410) 260-6371 or [barbara.wilkins1@maryland.gov](mailto:barbara.wilkins1@maryland.gov)**



## **HB 727-Bereano**

Uploaded by: Bruce Bereano

Position: INFO

# GREAT MARYLAND OUTDOORS ACT

House Bill 727 - Senate Bill 541  
Delegate Eric Luedtke & Senator Sarah Elfreth

The Great Maryland Outdoors Act will facilitate the development of a world-class State Park system in Maryland by making long-overdue investments in staffing, maintenance, land acquisition, and more!

## Relieves overcrowding in State Parks

Provides **\$30 million** for Land Acquisition to relieve overcrowding in State Parks that frequently reach capacity & creates new opportunities to expand access for all Marylanders



## Reverses decades of underfunding for our State Park system

Provides **\$70 million** for conservation projects, historic preservation, transportation improvements, and increasing access to water in State Parks

## Repairs and upgrades Critical State Park Infrastructure

Provides **\$80 million** for: Picnic areas, campgrounds, cabins, visitor centers, playgrounds, pavilions, beaches, bathhouses, roads, parking lots, nature centers, marinas, and more!



## Adds 100 Park Rangers, Technicians, Naturalists & Historians

## Establishes the Parks and Recreation Commission

Provides continuous and enduring support to the Maryland Park Service and facilitates effective and regular communication with the General Assembly



## Creates Freedman's State Historical Park

Preserves and interprets the lives of Black Americans before and after the Abolition of Slavery

## Develops a long-term approach and strategy to expanding and improving the State Park System



## Acknowledges the role, dedication, and value of Maryland's iconic State Park Rangers

## Stimulates more than \$650 million of economic impact in Maryland Communities

Formally recognizes the role of State Park Rangers in public safety and resource protection by designating them as Emergency Services Personnel



# **'22 HB 727 DNR-MD Park Service & State Parks DGS L**

Uploaded by: Ellen Robertson

Position: INFO

Larry Hogan  
Governor

Boyd K. Rutherford  
Lt Governor



OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

Ellington E. Churchill, Jr.  
Secretary

Nelson E. Reichart  
Deputy Secretary

**BILL:** **House Bill 727**  
Natural Resources - Maryland Park Service and State Parks - Alterations  
Great Maryland Outdoors Act

**COMMITTEE:** House Environment and Transportation

**DATE:** February 23, 2022

**POSITION:** Letter of Information

Upon review of House Bill 727 Natural Resources - Maryland Park Service and State Parks - Alterations (Great Maryland Outdoors Act), the Maryland Department of General Services (DGS), provides these comments for your consideration.

This bill would require DGS to work with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), to create an asset management database along with providing the necessary staff and technology for the operation of the database.

This bill establishes new funding streams for DNR, in which the DGS Design, Construction, and Energy Division (DCE) and DGS Office of State Procurement (OSP) would be involved with most of the related work because of DNR's current \$50,000 small procurement authority. In FY 2024 an appropriation of \$80 million goes into the *Park System Critical Maintenance Fund*. The funding of \$80 million must be expended by July 1, 2026 and would entail an enormous impact to DGS because of our required oversight of the procurement, project management, and construction work associated with the fund.

The second fund established in the bill is the *Park System Capital Improvement and Acquisition Fund* with an appropriation of \$70 million in FY 2024. DGS would be actively involved with all carve-outs in this fund, which include:

- \$5 million for climate change mitigation strategies
- \$5 million for historic preservation
- \$20 million for transportation improvements
- \$10 million for increasing water access
- \$30 million for land acquisition



To support DNR, DGS would need additional support for their project management and construction inspection teams as the bill indicates funding would be continual. This personnel increase would equate to an initial expenditure of ~\$476,000 in FY 2023 and increasing annually to ~\$1.2 million in FY 2027. **It must be emphasized that it would not be possible to absorb the added project funding of ~\$150 million using existing staff without a significant negative impact to work quality, quantity, and efficiency.**

House Bill 727 alters the definition of a “small procurement” for capital projects or maintenance with a value that is \$100,000 or less. **Currently, DNR has a small procurement threshold of \$50,000 and the move to \$100,000, at this time, would not be advisable. The necessary systems, processes and procurement staff must be in place in order to conduct these larger procurements.**

For additional information, contact Ellen Robertson at 410-260-2908.

## **HB727\_DD Council\_INFO**

Uploaded by: Zachary Hands

Position: INFO





## **Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council**

**CREATING CHANGE • IMPROVING LIVES**

**House Environment and Transportation Committee**

**HB 727: Natural Resources - Maryland Park Service and State Parks - Alterations**

**(Great Maryland Outdoors Act)**

**February 23, 2022**

### **Letter of Information**

The Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council (DD Council) is an independent, public policy organization that creates changes to make it possible for people with developmental disabilities to live the lives they want with the support they need. The DD Council is led by people with developmental disabilities and their families. As such, one of their priorities is to advocate for and fund inclusive recreation programs and activities that are fully accessible. This bill has the potential to do just that.

This bill seeks to address important structural and accessibility needs within all of Maryland's state parks by providing additional funding and requiring the development of long-term strategic goals to meet those needs. The DD Council appreciated the opportunity to provide information regarding the accessibility of our state parks to people with disabilities during a meeting of the State Park Investment Commission last year.

A record number of Marylanders have visited state parks over the last two years, and this dramatic increase has highlighted some of the much needed upgrades to ensure that all Marylanders can visit and enjoy our parks. 10.7% of all Marylanders and 22.47% of Marylanders 18 and older are people with disabilities, yet access to our state parks remains an issue to most of them. A lack of public transportation options that service state parks is a major barrier to access for people with disabilities. The majority of parks in Maryland also lack accessible restrooms, playgrounds for children, accessible picnic areas, paved trails, and adaptive recreational equipment.

In fact, of Maryland's 66 state parks, only:

- 33 have accessible playgrounds for children
- 25 have accessible picnic areas/pavilions
- 8 have adaptive recreational equipment
- 4 have paved, accessible trails
- 2 have accessible bathrooms

The Council is encouraged by the inclusion of the requirement that all future designs and considerations of amenities utilize universal principles to ensure maximum access for all Marylanders as we reimagine the experience of visiting our treasured state parks. Last year's legislative requirement that all new or renovated public buildings must include a changing facility for personal care needs of adults was an example of a step in the right direction to making our public parks inclusive and accessible for people with disabilities.

Contact: Zach Hands, Communications and Legislative Liaison, [zhands.mddc@gmail.com](mailto:zhands.mddc@gmail.com)