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## **HOUSE BILL 788 State and Local Parks – Child Safe Zone Program – Establishment (Equitable Access to Safe Parks Act) (Stein)**

### **STATEMENT OF INFORMATION**

**DATE:** February 23, 2022

**COMMITTEE:** House Environment & Transportation

**SUMMARY OF BILL:** HB 788 establishes the Child Safe Zone Program and Fund in the Department of Natural Resources to provide funding for capital and operating expenses associated with enhancing public safety in State and local parks, including staffing (security and law enforcement); and mandates an appropriation in the amount of \$1 million in FY 2024.

**EXPLANATION:** The Department of Budget and Management's focus is not on the underlying policy proposal being advanced by the legislation, but rather on the \$1 million mandated appropriation provision, which impacts the FY 2024 budget.

DBM has the responsibility of submitting a balanced budget to the General Assembly annually, which will require spending allocations for FY 2024 to be within the official revenues estimates approved by the Board of Revenue Estimates in December 2022.

Changes to the Maryland Constitution in 2020 provide the General Assembly with additional budgetary authority, beginning in the 2023 Session, to realign total spending by increasing and adding items to appropriations in the budget submitted by the Governor. The legislature's new budgetary power diminishes, if not negates, the need for mandated appropriation bills.

Fully funding the implementation of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future (Kirwan) will require fiscal discipline in the years ahead, if the State is to maintain the current projected structural budget surpluses. Mandated spending increases need to be reevaluated within the context of this education funding priority and the Governor's tax relief proposals.

Economic conditions remain precarious as a result of COVID-19. High rates of inflation and workforce shortages may be short lived or persist, thereby impacting the Maryland economy. While current budget forecasts project structural surpluses, the impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic continues to present a significant budgetary vulnerability. The Department continues to urge the General Assembly to focus on maintaining the structural budget surplus.

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

45 Calvert Street · Annapolis, MD 21401-1907

Tel: 410-260-7041 · Fax: 410-974-2585 · Toll Free: 1-800-705-3493 · TTY Users: Call via Maryland Relay

<http://dbm.maryland.gov>