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Education, Energy, and
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Executive Nominations Committee



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

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The Senate Education, Energy, and Environment Committee

**SB 823 – Natural Resources – Annual State Park Pass – Discounts for Law Enforcement
Officers and First Responders**

Statement of Support by Bill Sponsor Senator Mary Beth Carozza

Thank you, Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and my fellow members of the distinguished Senate Education, Energy, and Environment Committee for allowing me to present Senate Bill 823 – Natural Resources - Annual State Park Pass - Discounts for Law Enforcement Officers and First Responders.

The Maryland Park Service passport allows for unlimited day-use admission to Maryland’s state parks and facilities, unlimited boat launching at all applicable state park facilities and a ten percent discount on state-operated concession items and boat rentals. These passes currently cost \$75 for Maryland residents and this legislation would create a \$40 discount for law enforcement officers and first responders, including firefighters, paramedics, emergency medical technicians, and 911 specialists who are Maryland residents.

We learned during the COVID-19 pandemic that access to the outdoors is essential for health and wellbeing. Maryland State Parks saw a 44% increase in visitation during the first six months of 2020 alone and it has been estimated that spending two hours or more outside each week positively impacts general health and wellbeing.

The public safety sector has been facing an acute workforce shortage that puts our neighborhoods and communities at risk. The Maryland State Firemen’s Association and the Maryland Association of Counties have already partnered to support Senate Bill 414, Senator Augustine’s bill to form a task force to prioritize incentives to increase retention and recruitment for our firefighters, EMS, 911, and law enforcement. Senate Bill 823 simply allows our first responders and their families to benefit from the State Park pass discount effective this year.

Our first responders and law enforcement officers are on the front lines every day protecting our communities in high-stress environments. Maryland already offers veterans of the Armed Forces a day-use waiver, allowing them to enjoy our State Parks for free. Giving our emergency responders their own discount is a simple, meaningful way to not only thank them for their service but to promote the health and well being of our first responders.

I truly appreciate your kind attention and consideration, and I respectfully ask for a swift and favorable report on SB 823.