

MARY BETH CAROZZA
Legislative District 38
Somerset, Wicomico,
and Worcester Counties

Education, Energy, and
the Environment Committee

Executive Nominations Committee



Annapolis Office
James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Room 316
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3645 · 301-858-3645
800-492-7122 Ext. 3645
Fax 410-841-3006 · 301-858-3006
MaryBeth.Carozza@senate.state.md.us

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

March 29, 2023

The House Environment and Transportation 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 Barve, Vice Chair Stein, and members of the distinguished House Environment and Transportation Committee for allowing me to present Senate Bill 823 – Natural Resources - Annual State Park Pass - Discounts for Law Enforcement Officers and First Responders. I want to thank Secretary Kurtz and staff from the Maryland Department of Natural Resources for working with me on this legislation.

The best ideas for legislation come from the front lines with our constituents, and that was the case when Steve Mizell, a retiree from the Salisbury Fire Department came forward during the Interim with a suggestion that ultimately became Senate Bill 823. Mr. Mizell, who has openly discussed his challenges with Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD), contacted me about his idea to offer a State Park Pass discount for 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.

Also, I respectfully request your support for the amendment I have shared with you to move the effective date from October 1 to June 1 in order for our first responders to enjoy the discount this summer.

I want to thank the Fire/EMS Coalition and the Maryland State Firemen's Association for their support. I truly appreciate your kind attention and consideration, and I respectfully ask for a swift and favorable report on SB 823.