

SB0312_DNR_SUP_EEE-2-11-25.pdf

Uploaded by: Emily Wilson

Position: FAV



Wes Moore, Governor
Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor
Josh Kurtz, Secretary
David Goshorn, Deputy Secretary

February 11, 2025

BILL NUMBER: Senate Bill – 312 – First Reader

SHORT TITLE: Natural Resources – State Parks – Maryland Golden Age Pass

DEPARTMENT’S POSITION: SUPPORT

EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT’S POSITION

The Golden Age Pass entitlements support access to parks and green spaces for older adults, and the entitlements within this bill are already standard practice within the Maryland Park Service. This bill would simply codify these provisions.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Currently, any resident 62 years or older may purchase a Golden Age Pass from the Maryland Park Service. Pass holders may camp overnight in any State Park at one-half of the established fee Monday through Thursday, excluding holidays. The pass also permits free day-use entry and boat launching at any State Park that charges a fee. When the fee in effect is per vehicle, everyone in the vehicle with the pass holder is admitted for free.

Several State Parks use automatic gates that will require Golden Age Pass holders to also have a supplementary magnetic swipe card to enter these locations (free of charge). They are obtained by reaching out to the specific parks to get the pass. These parks currently include Bohemia River, Point Lookout, St. Mary’s River, Rosaryville, and Sandy Point State Parks.

BILL EXPLANATION

This bill establishes that Golden Age Pass holders are entitled to free day-use entry at certain State Parks and authorizes launching a boat at any State Park without paying a boat launch fee. It also establishes that free day-use entry applies to everyone in the vehicle with a holder of the Golden Age Pass when the day-use fee is per vehicle.

Contact: Emily Wilson, Director, Legislative and Constituent Services (Acting)
emilyh.wilson@maryland.gov ♦ 410-260-8426 (office) ♦ 443-223-1176 (cell)

SB 312 Senator Simonaire_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Kara Contino

Position: FAV

BRYAN W. SIMONAIRE
Legislative District 31
Anne Arundel County

Education, Energy, and the
Environment Committee

Joint Committee on the Chesapeake and
Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area



James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Room 320
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3658 · 301-858-3658
800-492-7122 Ext. 3658
Fax 410-841-3586 · 301-858-3586
Bryan.Simonaire@senate.state.md.us

The Senate of Maryland
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

SB 312 - Natural Resources - State Parks - Maryland Golden Age Pass

I am Senator Bryan Simonaire presenting SB 312.

This is **an easy bill** as I worked with the **Department of Natural Resources** and **other stakeholders** to present this consensus legislation.

In **order to expedite this hearing**, I have asked my panel to only submit written support.

The **Department of Natural Resources** has a State Park pass for seniors. It is called the **Golden Age Pass** that can be obtained by individuals 62 years of age or older for a nominal application fee.

Currently, Maryland law **lays out what privileges are associated** with the **Maryland Golden Age Pass** in Natural Resources Article 5-1009, such as, **camp overnight** in any State Park at one-half of the established fee Monday through Thursday, excluding holidays.

However, **other privileges are NOT included in 5-1009** which are granted to Golden Age Pass holders, such as:

Free entry into State Parks

Clarifying language on other passengers in the vehicle

Unlimited and free boat launching in State Parks

While these other privileges are **included in regulations or website publications**, the Golden Age Pass section in law should be complete and list all the major privileges granted under this program.

Therefore, this **bill clarifies the privileges** that are granted under the Golden Age Pass.

There is **no fiscal impact** and there is **no opposition**.

For all these reasons, I ask for your favorable consideration.

SB 312State Parks MDGolden AgesPass.FAV.AARP.pdf

Uploaded by: Larry Zarzecki

Position: FAV



One Park Place | Suite 475 | Annapolis, MD 21401-3475
1-866-542-8163 | Fax: 410-837-0269
aarp.org/md | md@aarp.org | twitter: @aarpmc
facebook.com/aarpmc

SB 312 Natural Resources State Parks – Maryland Golden Ages Pass
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment
FAVORABLE
February 11, 2025

Good afternoon, Chair Feldman and members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee. My name is Larry Zarzecki, and I am a volunteer with AARP Maryland. AARP Maryland is proud to be one of the largest membership-based organizations in the state, representing nearly 850,000 members. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong support of SB 312 Natural Resources State Parks- Maryland Golden Ages Pass. I want to thank Senator Simonaire for introducing this bill during the 2025 legislative session.

AARP is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that empowers individuals to achieve their goals, strengthen communities, and advocate for critical issues affecting families—such as healthcare, employment and income security, retirement planning, affordable utilities, and protection from financial abuse.

SB 312 establishes that holders of the Maryland Golden Age Pass will receive free day-use entry at select state parks and will be exempt from boat launch fees. Additionally, the free day-use entry will apply to everyone traveling in the same vehicle with the pass holder under specified conditions.

AARP has consistently championed policies that enhance the financial security and overall well-being of older adults. Promoting access to recreational spaces like parks is one such policy, as it can improve physical and mental health while reducing financial burdens.

We draw inspiration from the U.S. National Park Service, which offers several fee-free days throughout the year, allowing access to iconic destinations like Yosemite, Yellowstone, and the Grand Canyon. For frequent visitors, the **America the Beautiful National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass** provides unlimited access to more than 2,000 federal recreation sites for an annual fee of \$80. Discounted or free passes are also available to older adults, military members, students, and individuals with disabilities. For seniors, an annual pass costs \$20, while a lifetime pass is available for \$80.

In 2023, more than 325 million people visited national parks, marking a 4% increase over the previous year. Great Smoky Mountains National Park led with 13.3 million visitors. Nationwide, over 400 park units are managed by the National Park Service, including national parks, monuments, memorials, and preserves. However, only 108 charge an entry fee, and additional fees apply for services such as camping, boat launches, and special tours.

The positive impact of outdoor recreation on mental health is well-documented, with studies showing that exposure to nature can reduce depression, lower stress hormone levels, and decrease the need for certain medications. According to AARP's Travel Trends Survey, nearly two-thirds of Americans aged 50 and older planned to travel in 2024, with 63% opting for domestic destinations—highlighting the strong demand for accessible and affordable recreational opportunities close to home.

AARP Maryland strongly believes that Maryland should offer a program equivalent to the federal Golden Age Pass to ensure older adults have access to the benefits of nature and recreation within our state.

We respectfully urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on SB 312. For further questions or follow-up, please contact Tammy Bresnahan at **tbresnahan@aarp.org** or by calling **410-302-8451**. Thank you for your consideration.

Maryland Catholic Conference_FAVSB312_.pdf

Uploaded by: Michelle Zelaya

Position: FAV



**February 11, 2025
SB312**

**Natural Resources - State Parks - Maryland Golden Age Pass
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
Position: Favorable**

The Maryland Catholic Conference (MCC) offers this testimony in support of **Senate Bill 312**. The Maryland Catholic Conference (MCC) is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals, and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

Senate Bill 312 establishes the Maryland Golden Age Pass, which grants its holders free day-use entry to specific State parks. Additionally, it waives boat launch fees at any State Park for pass holders. The bill also extends free entry privileges to all passengers in the same vehicle as the pass holder under certain conditions.

This bill aligns with Catholic social teaching principles of stewardship of creation and the common good. By making natural resources accessible to seniors and their families, it honors the dignity of older adults and promotes environmental appreciation. Supporting this bill reflects the Church's call to care for creation while fostering community and equity.

This bill promotes accessibility to State parks for older residents, encouraging outdoor recreation, fostering community well-being, and enhancing mental and physical health. By removing financial barriers, it increases park usage and supports conservation awareness. The legislation also strengthens intergenerational connections by enabling families to enjoy nature together.

The MCC appreciates your consideration and respectfully urges a favorable report for **Senate Bill 312**.