

Letter of Support SB781.pdf

Uploaded by: Amanda Brooks

Position: FAV



BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF
WASHINGTON COUNTY, MARYLAND

February 21, 2025

Senator Brian J. Feldman, Chair
Education, Energy, and the Environment
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: **Support for Senate Bill 781—Task Force on the Establishment of a State Park Dedicated to Veterans' Care**

Dear Senator Feldman:

The Board of County Commissioners of Washington County (the "Board") unanimously support the passage of SB 781. As currently drafted, SB 781 would create a task force on the Establishment of a State Park Dedicated to Veteran's Care.

The purpose of this task force is to study issues and estimated costs related to establishing a state park dedicated to providing recreational opportunities and therapeutic services to veterans. The Task Force must report its findings and recommendations to the Governor no later than December 1, 2026, and the bill calls for its own abrogation on June 30, 2027.


The Board supports this bill as written. Presently, a landowner wishes to donate acreage located in Southern Washington County in order to help establish the country's first state park dedicated to veteran care. Early plans for the facility would include cabins for private veteran retreats, an amphitheater, and other facilities specifically designed to cater to and support veterans.

Passage of SB 781 will initiate the process to determine the practicality and feasibility of establishing this state park. Accordingly, the Board strongly supports the passage of SB 781.

Sincerely,

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
OF WASHINGTON COUNTY, MARYLAND

BY:


John F. Barr, President

VeteransCaucusLegislationSupportLetter_SB781.pdf

Uploaded by: Benjamin Brooks

Position: FAV



MARYLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY
VETERANS CAUCUS

February 24, 2025

Senator Brian Feldman, Chair
Education, Energy & the Environment Committee
2W Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: SB781, Task Force on the Establishment of a State Park Dedicated to Veterans' Care
Hearing Date: March 4, 2025

Dear Chairman Feldman,

Please let this letter serve as notice of the support of the Maryland General Assembly Senate Veterans Caucus for Senate Bill 781.

After review by our respective legislative committee, the Senate Veterans Caucus believes that the above-mentioned legislation would provide a valuable benefit to the veterans of the State of Maryland and requests a favorable report.

With kindest regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Benjamin T. Brooks".

Senator Benjamin Brooks
Senate Chair

cc: Senator Paul Corderman

Senate Bill 781 Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Daniel Spedden

Position: FAV

Visit HAGERSTOWN

& Washington County, Maryland

February 20, 2025

Senator Brian J. Feldman
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee (Chair)
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

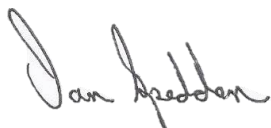
Dear Chairman Feldman,

Senate Bill 781, sponsored by Washington County Senator Paul Corderman, calls for a Task Force on the Establishment of a State Park Dedicated to Veterans' Care to study issues and estimate costs related to the establishment of a State Park dedicated to providing recreational opportunities and therapeutic services to veterans; and requiring the Task Force to report its findings and recommendations on or before December 1, 2026.

Providing support and care for combat veterans is crucial for their successful reintegration into civilian life and overall well-being. After experiencing the physical and emotional toll of combat, veterans often face unique challenges such as PTSD, anxiety, and difficulties adapting to everyday environments. Access to mental health services, peer support groups, and vocational training can significantly aid in their healing process and help them regain a sense of purpose. Furthermore, fostering a community that understands and appreciates their sacrifices not only empowers veterans but also enriches society. Ensuring that these heroes receive the necessary resources reinforces our commitment to honor their service and contribute to their long-term success.

Providing this care in the peaceful and scenic surroundings of a beautiful State Park dedicated to that purpose is a true innovation and one that will be unique to the State of Maryland. Establishing this park will also compliment the fact that it is everyone's responsibility to care for and reintegrate our veterans.

The Hagerstown/Washington County Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) is in full support of Senate Bill 781. The CVB will be a partner in the operation of the newly established State Park dedicated to veterans' care by promoting the park nationally as a preferred destination for veterans in need.



Dan Spedden, President

Veterans Care State Park Testimony Dan Spedden.pdf

Uploaded by: Daniel Spedden

Position: FAV

Maryland 2025 Legislative Session SB 781 HB 1181 Task force for the Development of a State Park Dedicated to Veterans Care.

Oral Testimony

Daniel P. Spedden

President

Hagerstown/Washington County Convention and Visitors Bureau

16 Public Square

Hagerstown, MD 21740

Cell 301.991.0521

dan@visithagerstown.com

Why Partner with The Maryland Park Service?

In December 2019 the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and the Maryland Department of Commerce teamed up to produce the Maryland Outdoor Recreation Economic Commission final report.

The report states that aside from the impact of regional economies, Maryland residents and nonresidents alike realize health and quality of life benefits from participating in outdoor recreation activities.

In December 2021 the Department of Legislative Services, Office of Policy Analysis produced the report of the State Park Investment Commission.

The report stated that DNR should investigate the possibility of establishing new State Parks or developing new amenities in current State parks.

The report further states that DNR should coordinate with county, municipal, and federal park systems to increase trail connectivity between park systems.

The Great Maryland Outdoors Act of 2022 calls for DNR to develop on behalf of State Parks a partnership plan to include County Tourism entities and Economic Development Offices.

The Act further calls for the creation of “Partnership Parks” managed by the department with a local government, a county agency, or a nonprofit.

Other benefits of a partner park include:

The potential use of The MD stadium authority or the Maryland Economic Development Corporation to manage construction.

Efficiencies in water and wastewater plant operations

Brand Recognition, the MD Park Service, is a trusted and recognizable brand.

SB 781 - Task Force - FAV - REALTORS.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa May

Position: FAV



Senate Bill 781 – Task Force on the Establishment of a State Park Dedicated to Veterans' Care

Position: Support

On behalf of our members residing in Western Maryland, Maryland REALTORS® offers support for SB 781, establishing a task force to study the creation of a veterans' care retreat.

Western Maryland is an ideal location for establishing a facility for veterans. It has easy access to nature, to transportation facilities in multiple states, and to Veterans Administration healthcare facilities.

We also see this as an opportunity for economic development, as similar retreat centers hold conferences and events throughout the year. This facility would bring much needed revenue to local businesses and communities and provide positive exposure for the state of Maryland among the veteran population both within and outside our state borders.

Based on the above, REALTORS® ask for your support of SB 781.

**For more information contact lisa.may@mdrealtor.org
or christa.mcgee@mdrealtor.org**

MAB Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Michael Bowers

Position: FAV

My name is Mike Bowers, and I am a Hagerstown native and lifelong Marylander.

For 30 of my 50 years, I was an active duty and lived outside of Maryland. But my loyalty to the state never waned. I remained a legal resident of the state and always paid my taxes and voted as often as possible. After my recent transition from the Marines in 2023, I am now back full time in Hagerstown.

Despite the thousands of Veterans in Washington County and high per capita of Veterans and their families and caregivers, it is an area of the state which has been left behind when it comes to proportional resources and services. Developing a state park dedicated to Veteran well-being and care would make up for years of neglect and directly benefit those of us who truly need it.

You see, each war carries with it different type of injuries and outdoor therapeutic services proves important for them all. Beyond those services, consistency is critical to make a difference and having a stable funding stream from the state is critical.

My personal story involves multiple traumatic brain injuries while training for and fighting in Iraq. I will share those experiences in my testimony.

Letter of Support - Senate Bill 781.pdf

Uploaded by: Paul Corderman

Position: FAV



Shenandoah Energy Advisors

February 28, 2025

Senate Education, Energy and Environment Committee

Chair Brian J. Feldman

Vice Chair Cheryl C. Kagan

2 West Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Education, Energy and Environment Committee,

I am writing in support of Senate Bill 781 that would establish a Task Force on the Establishment of a State Park Dedicated to Veterans' Care. The task force would study issues and estimate costs related to establishing a State Park dedicated to providing recreational opportunities and therapeutic services to veterans.

I see major advantages for the State of Maryland in establishing a task force to conduct a comprehensive analysis of this proposed project:

- This is an opportunity to create a successful public-private partnership that addresses two of Governor Wes Moore's major priorities: veterans' care and mental health support.
- On the private sector side, there are several attractive financial sources for various aspects of the park:
 - Donation of the land in Washington County to a not-for-profit organization highly experienced in caring for veterans' mental health issues by holding clinics, conferences and retreats for veterans and their families.
 - Capital costs for construction could primarily come from private sector resources. Already, there have been commitments from local construction businesses to help build a center and lodging rooms.
 - Ongoing operating costs could be derived from renting these facilities to not-for-profits for their veterans' program – conferences, retreats, etc. I understand that serious interest has been expressed by two such organizations.
- Outstanding location for a veterans' retreat and conference center. This site in Washington County has natural beauty on the Potomac River across from Harper's Ferry, access from the DC metropolitan area by rail and highway, and proximity to other major national and state parks (Harper's Ferry National Park, C&O Canal National Park, Antietam Battlefield National Park, Appalachian Trail National Park, and Gambrill State Park. These parks provide a host of programs and opportunities that would serve veterans' health care.



Shenandoah Energy Advisors

- Close access to Veterans Administration healthcare expertise at the Martinsburg VA Center in Martinsburg WV.
- This could be marketed as the first state park in the nation dedicated to Veterans care and put Maryland at the forefront of assisting healthcare for veterans and their families.

My interest and support for this project is based on my background: Vietnam combat veteran with 2 Purple Hearts; US Military Academy graduate (1969); and owner of a veteran small business, Shenandoah Energy Advisors, LLC.

Thank you for this opportunity to present my support for Senate Bill 781.

Sincerely yours,

TR Wheelock

Thomas R. Wheelock
735 The Woods Rd.
Hedgesville, WV 25427

ORWF LOS SB 781.pdf

Uploaded by: Paul Corderman

Position: FAV



OPERATION RED WINGS FOUNDATION

1414 11th Street, Huntsville, Texas 77340
936-775-6075 - ORWFoundation.org
EIN # 27-18500918

February 26, 2025

Senate Education, Energy and Environment Committee
Chair Brian J. Feldman
Vice Chair Cheryl C. Kagan
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Education, Energy and Environment Committee,

Please let this serve as my wholehearted endorsement for the creation of a task force to study the prospect of establishing the Nation's First State Park Dedicated to Veteran's Care, SB 781.

I am the executive director of Operation Red Wings Foundation, headquartered in Huntsville, Texas. We operate therapeutic retreats at various locations around the country, including Maryland where we've utilized the Military Bowl Foundation's Patriot Point facility. We provide retreats to veterans from all branches of service, male and female. In addition to the veteran retreats, we provide "spouse and significant other" retreats. If a veteran goes through the program as an individual, they then have an opportunity to return and attend a "couples" retreat. All of our retreats are provided at no cost to the veterans and their families. We transport the veterans, house and provide all meals as well as multiple therapies. Operation Red Wings Foundation has been successfully providing retreats since 2011 and have always maintained a waiting list as our retreats have proven to be very successful. Our applications to attend have increased in each of the past 4 years.

If the task force is created and a state park is established honoring our veterans with an emphasis on mental health, we would be pleased and honored to promote and would hope we could utilize the property when it becomes available. If you would like additional information relative to our operations, therapies, testimonials, etc, I would be pleased to address those.

The establishment of a state park dedicated to veteran's care is such a worthwhile endeavor and there is tremendous need for these services. My understanding is that a couple of Governor Moore's primary interests include veterans and mental health. This will be a great step forward in addressing those. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Dale Enderlin
Executive Director
Operation Red Wings Foundation
936-755-6075, dale@orwfoundation.org

SB 781 Senator Corderman Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Paul Corderman

Position: FAV

PAUL D. CORDERMAN
Legislative District 2
Frederick and Washington Counties

Budget and Taxation Committee

Subcommittees

Capital Budget

Education, Business and Administration



James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Room 403
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3903 • 301-858-3903
800-492-7122 Ext. 3903
Paul.Corderman@senate.state.md.us

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

March 4, 2025

Senate Education, Energy and Environment Committee
Chair Brian J. Feldman
Vice Chair Cheryl C. Kagan
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Education, Energy and Environment Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to present SB 781 to you today. SB 781 establishes a Task Force on the Establishment of a State Park Dedicated to Veterans' Care. This bill is designed to honor the service of our veterans by exploring the creation of a state park focused on providing recreational opportunities and therapeutic services tailored specifically to Veteran's needs.

Our Veterans, who have given so much in service to our country, face unique challenges when returning to civilian life. Many veterans experience physical and mental health issues, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and physical injuries, which can make reintegration into society difficult. This proposed park would serve as a sanctuary—offering not only recreational activities but also therapeutic services that can help improve their quality of life.

The Task Force will assess the costs, funding models, and operational structures necessary to make this park a reality. Furthermore, the Task Force will develop a clear action plan for the next steps, including funding options and sustainable operational models, making sure the park can continue to serve our veterans well into the future.

The proposed park not only represents a tangible way to care for our veterans, but it also exemplifies our commitment to ensuring that Maryland is a state that values the sacrifices made by those who have served in the military. The impact of such a facility would be profound, providing a peaceful space for healing and community for those who have dedicated their lives to protecting our freedoms.

Thank you for your consideration of this bill, and we respectfully request a favorable report on SB 781.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "P.D. Corderman", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Paul D. Corderman
District 2 – Washington & Frederick Counties

TerraFirma2Pager.pdf

Uploaded by: Paul Corderman

Position: FAV



TERRA FIRMA

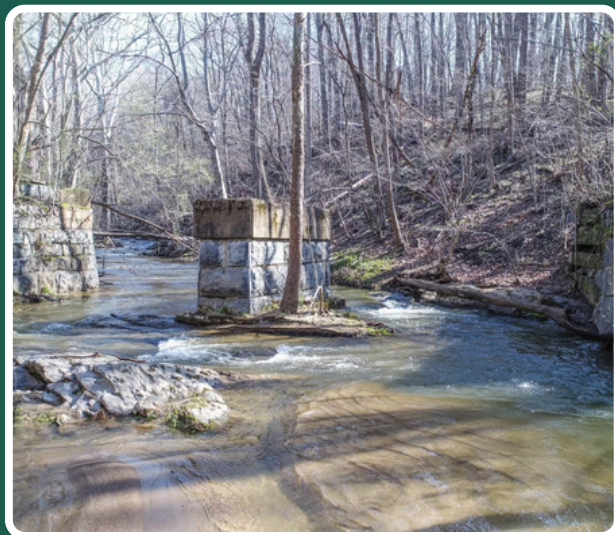
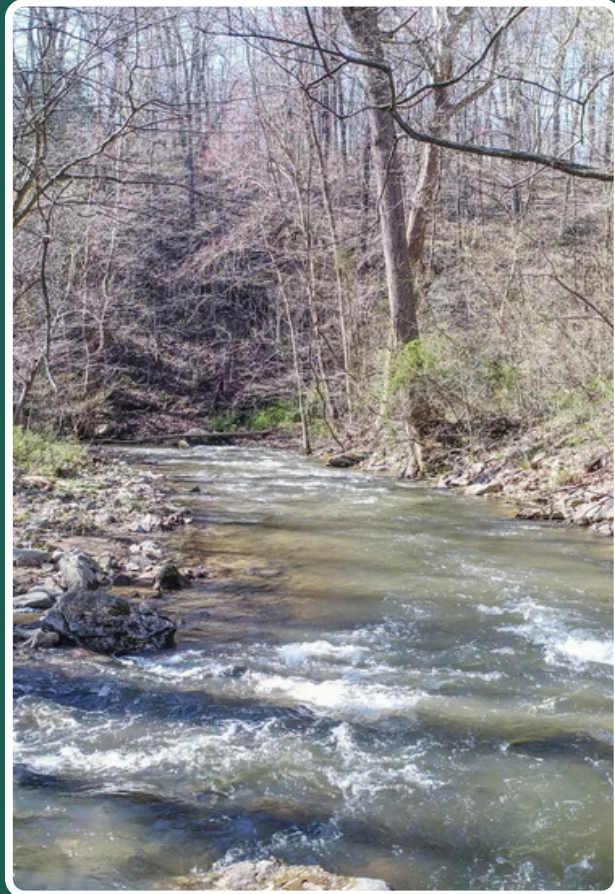
RETREAT CENTER



The Nation's First State Park Dedicated to Veterans Care

The Armstrong and Philbrick families are generously donating land in hopes of establishing a world-class facility dedicated to serving our veterans in meaningful ways.

Located in Weverton, Maryland, the property is ideally positioned at the confluence of the Appalachian Trail, the C&O Canal, and the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers. It's also conveniently near the MARC Train Station in Brunswick, Maryland.



Bill Armstrong, board member of Operation Red Wings Foundation (501c3), supports veterans facing PTSD, TBI, depression, and other service-related injuries through therapeutic retreats.

He also partners with **Steve Beck**, CEO of the Military Bowl Foundation, which owns and operates Patriot Point, a premier veterans retreat in Madison, Maryland.

Join Us in Supporting Our Veterans!

Help us create a place where those who served can heal, connect, and find peace. It's our turn to give back to those who selflessly served our country.



Email: billarmstrong77@gmail.com

Phone: 301-606-9101

Website: terrafirmaretreat.org

Steve Beck Testimony Re SB781.pdf

Uploaded by: Stephen Beck

Position: FAV



MILITARY BOWL

@MILITARYBOWL | @PATRIOT_POINT | @DCTOUCHDOWNCLUB

March 4, 2025

Senate Education, Energy and Environment Committee
Chair Brian J. Feldman
Vice Chair Cheryl C. Kagan
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Education, Energy and Environment, Committee,

Hello, my name is Steve Beck and I am the President and Executive Director of the Military Bowl Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. I am writing today in support of SB781 to establish a task force to study issues for a state park dedicated to veterans' care.

The Military Bowl Foundation was founded in 2008 as the DC Bowl Committee, originally created to organize an annual college football game. In 2010, that bowl game became known as the Military Bowl, dedicated to honoring and supporting the nation's service members.

A few years later, the name of the organization was changed to its present name, to more accurately reflect what our organization does. Now, in 2025, the Military Bowl Foundation is about much more than our annual bowl game, which takes place each December, since 2013, at Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium in Annapolis.

In 2016, the Foundation purchased a 294-acre property near Cambridge, Maryland, and established Patriot Point, a retreat center for wounded, ill and injured service members, their families and caregivers to enjoy outdoor recreational activities in a safe environment.

I am not exaggerating when I say that Patriot Point is one of the most important places in our great state – and beyond. We overhauled the property, improving accessibility for guests with special needs and enhancing activities on site. We furthered existing partnerships and built new relationships with veteran and military service organizations to increase our reach. Add it all up and we have a truly special place, one that has a direct connection to our philanthropy.

Roughly 500 guests visit Patriot Point annually. Some fish. Others hunt. Some work out in the Under Armour Freedom Fitness Center. Some do yoga. Some sit on the beach and relax. Some feed chickens or tend to plants in the greenhouse. They might take out a kayak or a stand-up paddleboard – Patriot Point has 2.3 miles of shoreline. Some go out on a boat for a ride or to cast a line and fish. Others partake in skeet shooting.

Military Bowl Foundation, Inc.

📍 1742 N Street, NW Washington, D.C. 20036

@ info@militarybowl.org



MILITARY BOWL

@MILITARYBOWL | @PATRIOT_POINT | @DCTOUCHDOWNCLUB

Guests might stay for just a day, overnight, a weekend or even a week. Regardless how long the duration of their stay, the feedback is nearly universal: "When can I come back?"

At Patriot Point, we say that "Healing begins at the gate," and that certainly is true. Along the winding, gravel driveway from the road to the property, you can sense guests – many of whom have endured extreme trauma – dropping their guard, taking a breath and exhaling.

It is incredibly motivating to see the impact that Patriot Point makes and so rewarding to know the positive difference we are making.

Consider what one retired U.S. Army Green Beret told us after visiting Patriot Point: "Patriot Point allowed me to enjoy the camaraderie of veterans and people who support veterans. It is not only physically relaxing but mentally encouraging. To be at Patriot Point, you get to take a deep breath and relax for a while. It is very rewarding. Patriot Point is a welcoming atmosphere for all veterans. I hope many more people can get a chance to visit and benefit from this amazing place."

But no matter how hard we try to reach as many service members as possible, we know that we are only scratching the surface. Our nation's active-duty and veteran service members need us. These brave defenders of freedom need to know that someone cares about their well-being. That there are people who genuinely want to help them overcome the adversity they face as a result of serving our country. There is no shortage of people who need a stay at a place like Patriot Point to help ease their mind and help them focus on their own personal healing journeys.

The establishment of a state park in Western Maryland that will be dedicated to veterans' care would be an amazing resource for so many Maryland residents. According to the Maryland Department of Veterans and Military Families, nearly 360,000 veterans reside in our state, with another 100,000 on active-duty or serving in the reserves or National Guard. These men and women need to know that we want to help them.

The Military Bowl Foundation is here to help the state in any way we can, whether that is helping to establish partnerships, recommending or helping run programs and/or assisting in fundraising activities or more. Just let us know. This is what we do and we would be happy to share our knowledge and experience.

Sincerely,

Steve Beck
President & Executive Director
Military Bowl Foundation

Military Bowl Foundation, Inc.

1742 N Street, NW Washington, D.C. 20036 @ info@militarybowl.org

Armstrong LOS 781.pdf

Uploaded by: William Armstrong

Position: FAV

March 4, 2025

Senate Education, Energy and Environment Committee
Chair Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair Cheryl C. Kagan
2 West Miller Senate Office Building Annapolis, MD 21401

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Education, Energy and Environment Committee,
Please allow me to offer my enthusiastic support for SB 781!

My family owns the property being considered as a catalyst for what hopefully could become the First State Park in the Country Dedicated to Veterans Care. In many respects this property and the plans we envision could be a perfect fit in addressing at least 2 of Governor Moore's priorities... Veterans and mental health!

Creating a task force to study the fiscal impact is necessary as I believe we can demonstrate how such a bold endeavor can be accomplished with minimal financial impact while having a great return on investment.

In addition to partnering with Veterans organizations which may be able to promote, fundraise and utilize the property, we believe the property brings lots of additional benefits. The state could certainly use more trailhead access. The parking lot across the road which serves the Weverton Cliffs section of the Appalachian Trail is definitely over capacity most weekends as cars are parked along both sides of the road and there is heavy family/pedestrian traffic. The federal "rails to trails" initiative could be extended using the abandoned railroad trellis' and rights of way via our property.

When the property isn't being used for Veterans retreats or events, the County and State will have a wonderful asset to be utilized as everyone deems appropriate.

This property has such an ideal location as it's literally steps away from 2 National Parks, The Appalachian Trail and The C&O Canal. Just across the Potomac River is Harper's Ferry. It is served by 3 international airports, Washington Dulles is 38 miles, Reagan is 60 miles, BWI is 67 miles and it's also serviced by the MARC train with the station in Brunswick, Md.

Once again, I enthusiastically support the creation of a task force to study the potential creation of The First State Park Dedicated to Veterans Care. Please know that I am pleased to provide any additional information you require.

Sincerely,



William Armstrong, CIPS GRI MRP AHWD
NAR Global Ambassador to France
2011-2013 NAR Treasurer
Past President Maryland Realtors
Mackintosh, Inc. Realtors
262 W. Patrick Street
Frederick, Maryland 21701
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SB0781_DNR_LOI_EEE_3-4-25.pdf

Uploaded by: Emily Wilson

Position: INFO



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

March 4, 2025

BILL NUMBER: **Senate Bill 781 – First Reader**

SHORT TITLE: **Task Force on the Establishment of a State Park Dedicated to Veterans' Care**

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: **LETTER OF INFORMATION**

EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT'S POSITION

This bill requires the Department to participate in and staff a new task force to develop a state park dedicated to veteran's care. The Department currently works with a state Parks and Recreation Commission to advise the Department on several important policy and operational issues facing state parks. In addition, it is unclear from the bill language who would oversee the veteran's care, for which the Department does not have expertise, directed in the bill proposal.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Department oversees and staffs dozens of advisory bodies – including commissions, advisory councils, task forces and many sub-entities of these groups. The Great Maryland Outdoors Act (SB 541) of the 2022 General Assembly, adopted a number of important provisions related to Maryland State Parks and public lands. Included in the bill was a requirement to create a new Parks and Recreation Commission. The commission includes more than a dozen members, with at least four appointees from the Maryland legislature.

BILL EXPLANATION

SB 781 requires the Department to establish a task force to study the creation of a Veteran's care state park.