

2026 SB 161 Senator Simonaire_FAV.pdf

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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



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The Senate of Maryland
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

SB 161 – State Park IDs for Veterans

I am Senator Bryan Simonaire presenting SB 161.

I worked with the *Department of Natural Resources* on this consensus legislation.

This bill does 2 main things:

- 1) Expands the veteran identification allowed to enter a state park free of charge, and
- 2) Provides parity between those currently serving Maryland National Guard members and those who completed their service when it comes to entrance into our state parks.

First, under existing law, active-duty service members and all National Guard members are granted free access to State Parks.

However, the terminology used in the Veterans section excludes some members of the Maryland National Guard but served Maryland and fulfilled their obligations.

The bill ensures we honor former Maryland National Guard members and are granted free access to state parks as well.

Secondly, this bill expands the allowable identification forms used to allow veterans into state parks. With the recent passage of veteran notations on state professional licenses and identification cards, they are also now acceptable forms of identification.

That is the bill and for all these reasons, I ask for your favorable consideration.

Support

Uploaded by: Lydia McPherson

Position: FAV



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

January 27, 2026

BILL NUMBER: **SENATE BILL 161**

SHORT TITLE: Natural Resources - State Park Entry Fee - Exemptions

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: **SUPPORT**

EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT'S POSITION

The Department supports SB161 as it is consistent with current practices. The Maryland Park Service day-use service charges are already waived for active duty military, veterans, and members of the National Guard. This bill does not expand day-use service charge exemptions or materially alter anticipated revenue streams for the Maryland Park Service, but rather serves to identify the exemption in the Natural Resource Article 5-1015 and offers clarified language. No fiscal impacts are anticipated.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Last year SB282/Chap. 265 added new sections 5-1014 and 5-1015 to the Natural Resources Article, which allow for additional forms of veteran verification to be used for fee entrance to state parks, and went into effect on October 1st of 2025. SB161 further clarifies the types of acceptable veteran identification for free park entrance.

BILL EXPLANATION

This bill, 161, creates parity for all former Maryland National Guard members by clarifying the acceptable forms of identification that may be presented by a veteran to gain entry to State parks without paying a fee.

Contact: Lydia McPherson, Director, Legislative and Constituent Services
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Maryland Military Coalition SB0161 Written Testimo

Uploaded by: DAVID Dragics

Position: FWA



MARYLAND MILITARY COALITION

Serving Veterans through Legislative Advocacy

January 23, 2026

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman
Chair, Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Subject: Request for **FAVORABLE with Amendment Report** – SB0161 – Natural Resources –
State Park Entry Fee – Exemptions

Dear Chair Feldman and distinguished members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

On behalf of the members of the Maryland Military Coalition¹ (MMC), I write to request a **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENT Report** by the Committee on **SB0161 – Natural Resources – State Park Entry Fee – Exemptions**, sponsored by Senator Bryan Simonaire. This bill would exempt from State Park Entry fees former Maryland National Guard members if that individual was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable.

The MMC supports the intent of this bill. However, we believe that **this benefit should be extended to all former members of the Reserve Component who have been discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable**, not just former Maryland National Guard members. Under Article – State Government, §9-901 (H) and 38 U.S.C. §101(27), the Reserve Components “means, with respect to the Armed Forces— (A) the Army Reserve; (B) the Navy Reserve; (C) the Marine Corps Reserve; (D) the Air Force Reserve; (E) the Coast Guard Reserve; (F) the Army National Guard of the United States; and (G) the Air National Guard of the United States. The Reserve Component of the Commissioned Corps of the United States Public Health Service, as a uniformed service, must also be included. These individuals have served in uniform on weekends and at annual training just as their counterparts in the Maryland National Guard have. The MMC believes they are equally deserving of this modest recognition and benefit.

The MMC believes that expanding this benefit to all former members of the Reserve Component will not have a material impact on revenue from State Park Entry fees. Providing an exemption for all members of the Reserve Component could promote increased attendance at state parks. In those state parks where there is a per-person day-use entry fee, any decrease

¹ See attached list of member organizations.

Subject: Request for FAVORABLE with Amendment Report – SB0161 – Natural Resources – State Park Entry Fee – Exemptions

as a result of exempting a member of the Reserve Component will be offset by fees for family members.

The MMC recommends that **lines 21 and 22 of page one of SB0161** be amended to read: **Former Reserve Component status if the holder was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable.**

The Maryland Military Coalition supports SB0161 and asks for a **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENT** report from the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee.

The Maryland Military Coalition is a registered non-profit, non-partisan advocacy organization comprised of 22 prominent Maryland-based veteran and military groups. It represents over 150,000 service-connected individuals, including those currently serving, veterans, retirees and their families, caregivers and survivors. Visit our website at <https://mdmilcoalition.org/>.

We want to thank Senator Simonaire for sponsoring this legislation and supporting the uniformed services community in Maryland.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David L. Dragics".

David L. Dragics
COL (Ret), U.S. Army
Legislative Director



Member Organizations of the Maryland Military Coalition

Air Force Sergeants Association

American Military Society

American Minority Veterans Research Project

Association of the United States Navy

Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service

Disabled American Veterans

Fleet Reserve Association of Annapolis

Jewish War Veterans of the U.S.A

Maryland Air National Guard Retirees' Association

National Active and Retired Federal Employees, Maryland Veterans

Maryland Veterans Chamber of Commerce

Military Officers Association of America

Military Order of the Purple Heart

Military Order of the World Wars

Montford Point Marines of America

National Association of Black Veterans

National Active and Retired Federal Employees, Maryland Veterans

Naval Enlisted Reserve Association

NOAA Association of Commissioned Officers

Platoon 22

Reserve Organization of America

Society of Military Widows

Veterans of Foreign Wars