



BRANDON M. SCOTT
MAYOR

*Office of Government Relations
88 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401*

HB0959

February 25, 2026

TO: Members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee
FROM: Nina Themelis, Director, Mayor's Office of Government Relations
RE: HB 0959 - Natural Resources – Establishment of Gwynns Falls State Park

POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS

Chair Korman, Vice Chair Guyton, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** House Bill (HB) 0959 **with amendments**.

Gwynns Falls/Leakin Park is one of Baltimore's most treasured green spaces. At more than 1,200 acres, it is the largest urban wilderness park on the East Coast. It provides miles of trails, historic sites, forest habitat, waterways, and year-round recreation opportunities for residents across Baltimore City and the region. The park plays a critical role in environmental stewardship, stormwater management, public health, and community connection.

We appreciate the sponsor's commitment to increasing attention and investment in Gwynns Falls. The goals behind this bill are to raise the park's profile, improve infrastructure, enhance environmental restoration, and expand access, all priorities that we share.

Baltimore City welcomes a stronger partnership with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), which could bring additional resources, technical expertise, and statewide visibility to this incredible park. We are particularly supportive of coordinated master planning, in accordance with the City's land use responsibilities, and thoughtful long-term investment that strengthens both the natural environment and the visitor experience.

At the same time, we want to ensure that the governance structure is clear and workable. Gwynns Falls/Leakin Park is currently owned and operated by Baltimore City under authority in Article II, Section 21 of the Charter of Baltimore City, which vests control of City parks with the Mayor and City Council of Baltimore. As drafted, the bill would shift the park into the State park system, which carries operational and administrative implications, and would require the Maryland General Assembly to modify Section 21 of Article II of the Charter of Baltimore City.

If the shared goal is a collaborative model with the City retaining ownership and control while formalizing operational and funding partnerships with DNR through a memorandum of understanding, the bill language will need to be substantially amended to clearly reflect that. From an operational standpoint, clarity around roles, financial responsibility, staffing, maintenance, and public safety is essential to making the partnership successful.

The BCA also wants to ensure that any expansion of services or programming is paired with sustainable funding for ongoing operations, not just capital improvements. Long-term stewardship requires reliable operational support to maintain trails, facilities, natural areas, and visitor services at a high standard.

Baltimore City is actively working with the sponsor and DNR to refine the bill so that it strengthens Gwynns Falls Leakin Park while preserving a practical and effective management framework. We are committed to collaboration and believe we can arrive at a model that enhances the park for generations to come.

For the above reasons, the BCA respectfully requests a **favorable with amendments** report on HB 959.