

SB 21 Senator Simonaire_FAV_ENT.pdf

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Position: FAV

BRYAN W. SIMONAIRE
Legislative District 31
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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 21 – Golden Age Pass Revisions

I am Senator Bryan Simonaire presenting this consensus legislation SB 21 - *Golden Age Pass Revisions*.

This bill helps our seniors and has broad support.

I worked with and appreciated the support from the:

- *Department of Natural Resources*,
- *AARP (American Association of Retired Persons)* and
- other stakeholders.

This bill fixes the conflict between state law and DNR's current policy, as it relates to Maryland's *Golden Age Pass Program*.

The *Golden Age Pass* program can be obtained by individuals 62 years of age or older for a nominal application fee.

This provides seniors with:

1. Free entry into any Maryland State Park,
2. Half price camping, Sunday through Thursday - excluding holidays, and
3. Unlimited boat launch access at any Maryland State Park.

This bill updates our laws by:

- 1) Revising our *Maryland's Golden Pass* laws where they are in conflict with current policy, and
- 2) Revising our *Maryland's Golden Pass* laws so they match the services provided by the program.

First, the area of conflict, as it relates to discounts on camping:

Existing law only provides discounts for '*Monday through Thursday*' camping, whereas, current policy provides discounts for "*Sunday*

through Thursday' camping, thus providing our seniors with an extra day of discounts.

Secondly, this bill aligns the Maryland Golden Pass laws with the actual practice of the program in 2026.

Basically, our laws are outdated, and this bill revises them and also updates incorrect portions of the law.

There is no opposition, no fiscal impact and it is supported by DNR and our seniors.

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

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Uploaded by: Larry Zarzecki

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**SB 21 Natural Resources State Parks – Maryland Golden Age Pass
Environment and Transportation Committee
April 1, 2026
FAVORABLE**

Good afternoon, Chair Korman, Vice Chair Guyton, and members of the Environment and Transportation 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 21, Natural Resources State Parks - Maryland Golden Age Pass. I want to thank Senator Simonaire for introducing this bill.

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

Maryland's Golden Age Pass is a lifetime, low-cost program widely used by residents age 62 plus for free day-use entry and discounted camping at all Maryland State Parks. SB 21 builds on this already successful and established benefit that older Marylanders depend on. Fiscal and policy analysis confirms that SB 21 largely codifies existing regulations and practices, making it a high-impact, low-cost policy choice that maximizes equitable park access. It also allows day-use entry for everyone traveling in the same vehicle as the pass holder under specified conditions, benefiting multigenerational groups.

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

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 age 50 and older planned to travel in 2024, with 63 percent opting for domestic destinations, underscoring strong demand for accessible, 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 21.

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

April 1, 2026

BILL NUMBER: SENATE BILL – 21 – THIRD READER

SHORT TITLE: NATURAL RESOURCES – STATE PARKS – MARYLAND GOLDEN AGE PASS

DEPARTMENT’S POSITION: SUPPORT

EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT’S POSITION

The Department supports enhanced access to parks and green spaces for senior citizens. The Golden Age Pass entitlements within this bill are already standard practice within the Maryland Park Service and this bill would serve to codify them. While the department supports the goal of this legislation, it should be noted that it will also reduce the autonomy of the Maryland Park Service to adjust the Golden Age Pass program to meet evolving needs and circumstances in the future.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Currently, any resident 62 years or older may acquire a Golden Age Pass from the Maryland Park Service for a small processing fee. Pass holders may camp overnight in any State Park at one-half of the established fee Sunday 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. Greenbrier State Park will also be implementing an automated gate in the near future.

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 Golden Age Pass holder when the day-use fee is applied per vehicle.

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Maryland Catholic Conference_FAVSB21_ HOUSE CROSS.

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Position: FAV



April 1st, 2026

SB21

**Natural Resources - State Parks - Maryland Golden Age Pass
Environment and Transportation Committee**

Position: Favorable

The Maryland Catholic Conference (MCC) offers this testimony in support of **Senate Bill 21**. 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 21 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 care for creation and the common good. Ensuring that seniors can access and enjoy Maryland's parks honors the inherent dignity of older adults, many of whom live on fixed incomes and face increasing barriers to recreation and social connection. By reducing financial obstacles, the Golden Age Pass affirms that care for creation is not a privilege reserved for a few, but a shared responsibility and gift meant for all. 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 ability to bring family members along further strengthens bonds and fosters a sense of belonging and community. By supporting the Golden Age Pass, Maryland affirms its responsibility to care for older residents, protect creation, and ensure that the benefits of our shared natural resources remain accessible to all.

The Maryland Catholic Conference appreciates your consideration and respectfully urges a favorable report for **Senate Bill 21**.