



FOREVER
MARYLAND

Enhancing and Advancing Land Conservation

Board of Directors

Nick Dilks,
Chair
Will Cook,
Vice Chair
Adair Stifel,
Treasurer
John Griffin,
Secretary
Steve Quarles,
Immediate Past Chair

Mark Conway
Barry Salisbury
Mary Burke,
MET Board Liaison

Advisory Council

Bill Leahy
Rob Etgen
Ann H. Jones

Staff

Wendy Stringfellow
President
Michelle Boyle
VP of Development
Tricia Clarke
Director of Meetings
Josh Hastings
Program & Policy Director
Dina Lansinger
Keep Maryland Beautiful Grants Coordinator

Date: February 18, 2022
Bill Number: **HB 727 - Natural Resources - Maryland Park Service and State Parks - Alterations (Great Maryland Outdoors Act)**
Committee: House – Environment and Transportation
Position: Support with Amendment

Forever Maryland supports (with amendment), **HB 727 - Natural Resources - Maryland Park Service and State Parks - Alterations (Great Maryland Outdoors Act)** for the purpose of improving Maryland’s parks and recreation opportunities, accessibility, and greenspace acquisition and management.

This bill comes out of recommendations from the 2021 State Park Investment Commission. This Commission was to make recommendations on the need for new parks in “recreational deserts,” determine the level of accessibility to current parks, make recommendations regarding overcrowding in Maryland State parks, determine the levels of operating funding and staff for existing State parks, and to evaluate the need for capital funding to provide a high-quality experience to park visitors.

Among other things, this bill seeks to have the State: evaluate the condition of state parks; take inventory of all state land managed by the Department of Natural Resources; develop a maintenance project prioritization process; create a \$80M Park System Critical Maintenance Fund; have the Department of Budget and Management initiate a Park Service salary review; create a Parks and Recreation Commission to provide oversight of the Park Service; and have the Department of Natural Resources update the comprehensive long-range strategic plan every five years where it shall evaluate underserved and disadvantaged communities’ interactions of park land and greenspace.

Furthermore, the State shall create a \$70M park system Capital Improvements and Acquisition Fund where \$5M shall be used for infrastructure projects that mitigate the effects of climate change, \$5M for historic preservation, \$20M for transportation improvements, \$10M for increasing water access, and \$30M for land acquisition costs.

Forever Maryland generally supports the recommendations set out within this bill and, speaking on behalf of Maryland’s numerous local land trusts, **requests the following amendment to help address the immense problem of insufficient OAG staffing:**

5–2A–02. (3) THE STAFF POSITIONS REQUIRED UNDER PARAGRAPH (1) OF THIS 12 SUBSECTION SHALL INCLUDE: (I) FIVE POSITIONS IN THE ENGINEERING AND CONSTRUCTION UNIT; (II) TWO POSITIONS IN THE LAND ACQUISITION AND PLANNING UNIT; (III) THREE POSITIONS WITHIN THE OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL FOR REVIEW OF EASEMENT AND LAND ACQUISITION PROJECTS; AND (IV) ONE VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT PROGRAM COORDINATOR.

If further information is requested, please contact the organization’s Program and Policy Director, Josh Hastings, at 410-251-5268 or Josh@ForeverMaryland.org.

We respectfully request a favorable report with the included amendment.

FOREVER MARYLAND

2331 Rock Spring Road | Forest Hill, MD 21050 | 410-251-5268 | www.ForeverMaryland.org