



Senate Bill 541

*Natural Resources - Maryland Park Service and State Parks - Alterations
(Great Maryland Outdoors Act)*

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**
WITH AMENDMENTS

To: Budget and Taxation and Education, Health,
and Environmental Affairs Committees

Date: February 16, 2022

From: Dominic J. Butchko

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS SB 541 WITH AMENDMENTS**. The bill would make broad and historic investments in Maryland's State Parks to improve service and accessibility. Among the funding changes in SB 541 is an alteration to repayment of local-side park funding – **MACo urges an amendment to remedy a worrisome diversion of these funds, and to expand on collaborative elements already in the bill.**

State parks are a proven asset in growing healthy communities. They complement the various county park systems, providing leisure space, recognition and reflection of historical events, and tools for economic development. Active and healthy spaces add to a high quality of life for Marylanders.

During the great recession, several areas of state government were forced to make drastic cuts to their operating budgets. One major change was a diversion of funds away from local Program Open Space to help support state parks. Fast forward to the global pandemic, where demand for parks surged, and this unwise short-term solution has been exposed as a poor long-term policy. While SB 541 proposes a wholesale realignment of park funding and payback, the window is wide open to remedy this weak link in park support. **Amendments could stabilize and enhance state parks funding from the General Fund, and still reinstate the traditional local one-half share of Program Open Space.**

Under SB 541, in establishing the Freedman's State Historical Park, the State will be undertaking an innovative partnership model first implemented between federal and state parks. Counties urge that this provision be expanded to encourage more partnership parks, particularly in those few counties still lacking a state park, or where underserved populations can be more effectively reached.

SB 541 makes sensible investments in the state parks system and its next steps. Amidst these elements, amendments to the local funding and park partnerships could make a productive bill better, as part of a comprehensive approach to public recreation across Maryland. Accordingly, MACo urges the Committee to issue a **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** report for SB 541.