



## House Bill 420

### *State and Local Parks - Play Area Accessibility - Communication Boards*

MACo Position: **OPPOSE**

To: Environment & Transportation Committee

Date: February 14, 2024

From: Dominic J. Butchko

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **OPPOSES** HB 420 as drafted. This bill would mandate counties to use Program Open Space funds to install communication boards in all new parks as well as those undergoing significant renovation.

Program Open Space (POS) is the heartbeat of Maryland's recreation and conservation landscape. Enacted in the 1960s, POS is funded via the transfer tax from the sale of real estate, and for the majority of jurisdictions, represents the most significant influx of capital and operating dollars. POS funds are distributed to counties via a preset formula and are spoken for years in advance to help finance major projects. The success of POS is largely due to its empowerment of communities to develop recreation and conservation offerings that best meet their specific needs.

**For Fiscal Year 2025 the local share of POS is projected to shrink from roughly \$90 million to roughly \$30 million. This is NOT \$30 million per county, but \$30 million to be divided amongst all political subdivisions.** While some advocates state that communication boards cost roughly \$600-\$1000 each, most counties cite a price ranging from \$2500-\$5000. If enacted as-is, HB 420's unfunded mandate will further erode individual county distributions and ultimately hurt the very communities this bill is aiming to help.

While counties have significant concerns with the current language, MACo is grateful to the sponsor for developing a series of amendments which would alleviate county concerns. Specifically, the sponsor amendments create the Maryland Recreation Communication Boards Program (MRCBP) within the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The MRCBP would be allocated \$100,000 each year from the state side of POS, and these funds would be used to issues grants of up to \$5000 per communication board to be installed.

With these amendments, HB 420 retains the flexibility of local POS, while providing funding for the state's mandate. MACo would like to express sincere gratitude for the sponsor's willingness to engage in dialogue and find common ground. While counties **OPPOSE** the introduced bill, they urge the Committee to favorably consider the changes suggested above.