



**Maryland Developmental
Disabilities Council**

CREATING CHANGE • IMPROVING LIVES

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

SB 645: Maryland Trails Advisory Committee and the Maryland Office of Trails - Establishment (Great Maryland Trails Act)

February 29, 2024

Position: Support with Amendments

The Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council (Council) is an independent, public policy organization that creates change to make it possible for people with developmental disabilities to live the lives they want with the support they need. Our vision is that people with and without disabilities in Maryland live, learn, work, and play together.

The Council supports SB 645 with the following amendments to ensure the terms used to identify people with disabilities reflect preferences from the disability community:

- Replacing “DISABLED” with “DISABILITY” on page 9, line 8
- Replacing “REPRESENTATIVE OF INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE VISUALLY IMPAIRED” with “PERSON WITH A VISUAL DISABILITY” on page 9, line 10-11
- Replacing “REPRESENTATIVE OF INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE MOBILITY IMPAIRED” with “PERSON WITH A MOBILITY DISABILITY” on page 9, line 12-13

WHAT does this legislation do?

- This bill establishes the Maryland Office of Trails as a new office under the Department of Transportation. The bill requires the Department of Natural Resources to identify employees that will transfer to the Maryland Office of Trails.
- The Maryland Office of Trails will be responsible for developing and maintaining the Maryland Trail Network with the goal of expanding the use of trails in Maryland. The office will establish the Maryland Trails Advisory Commission and work with the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee.

WHY is this legislation important?

- **People with disabilities want and need access to inclusive recreation.** The Council collaborated with the Maryland Department of Disabilities to create a framework to support inclusive playgrounds across the state¹. By including the Department of Disabilities as a member of the Maryland Trails Advisory Commission, the Maryland Office of Trails can ensure their work also promotes inclusive recreation so all Marylanders can use trails.
- **Inclusive recreation creates opportunities for healthy living for people with disabilities.** People with disabilities have higher rates of most chronic diseases, such as heart disease, asthma, and diabetes, compared to people without disabilities². By growing the network of inclusive trails in Maryland, the Maryland Office of Trails creates more opportunities for people with disabilities to live the lives they want which includes exercise and time outside.

SB 645 creates more opportunities for all Marylanders to play together. For these reasons, the Council supports SB 645.

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¹www.md-council.org/inclusiveplayground-framework

² <https://www.nrpa.org/contentassets/adf76d09aef54240b4eb449ce6111b96/parksforinclusion-disability.pdf>