STATE OF NEW YORK

3019

2017-2018 Regular Sessions

IN SENATE

January 19, 2017

Introduced by Sen. RITCHIE -- read twice and ordered printed, and when printed to be committed to the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Tourism, Parks and Recreation

AN ACT to authorize and direct the commissioners of health and environmental conservation to study and develop a long-term strategy to encourage and promote outdoor environmental education and recreational opportunities in New York state

The People of the State of New York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:

Section 1. Legislative findings. The legislature recognizes that in the last two decades, childhood has moved indoors. The average American boy or girl spends just four to seven minutes each day in unstructured outdoor play, and more than seven hours each day in front of an electronic screen. The decline in the appreciation and prevalence of outdoor recreation opportunities profoundly impacts the wellness of our state's youth. The correlation between increasing childhood obesity rates and the decline in outdoor recreation is undeniable.

Additionally, the legislature recognizes that visual and physical access to basic types of open space is vital for everyone, and particularly valuable to children growing up in "urban hardscapes", or areas where access to nature is limited.

The legislature further finds that the development of policies that foster stewardship of the environment and recognition of the health benefits of time spent in nature are essential to the residents of New York state. The legislature concludes that this can best be accomplished by the creation of a study on outdoor environmental education and recreation.

§ 2. The commissioners of health and environmental conservation are hereby authorized and directed to study and develop a long-term strategy for integrating an aggressive outdoor environmental education and recreation plan for children that focuses on creating, developing and retain-

EXPLANATION--Matter in *italics* (underscored) is new; matter in brackets [-] is old law to be omitted.

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ing opportunities for outdoor play and learning in New York state. Such strategy shall be based on an analysis of the overall health of our youth including the rise in childhood obesity rates, economic trends and their impact on access to outdoor spaces as well as all other factors necessary to develop a state-level blueprint for outdoor education and recreating. Such strategy shall be developed in consultation with health and environmental conservation advisory bodies created or authorized by statute and such other organizations or persons as the commissioners shall deem appropriate. Within one year of the effective date of this act, the commissioners shall submit a report of their findings and recommendations, including proposed legislation, if any, to the governor and the legislature.

§ 3. This act shall take effect immediately.