

STATE OF NEW YORK

5025

2021-2022 Regular Sessions

IN SENATE

February 22, 2021

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

AN ACT creating a legislative task force on outdoor environmental education and recreation that will benefit residents of New York state by stewardship and conservation of the environment, an appreciation of the importance of the wise use of natural resources as well as acknowledgment of the health benefits of time spent in nature

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

1 Section 1. Legislative findings. (a) The legislature hereby finds that
2 in the last two decades, childhood has moved indoors. The average Ameri-
3 can boy or girl spends just four to seven minutes each day in unstruc-
4 tured outdoor play, and more than seven hours each day in front of an
5 electronic screen. The decline in the appreciation and prevalence of
6 outdoor recreation opportunities profoundly impacts the wellness of our
7 state's youth. The correlation between increasing childhood obesity
8 rates and the decline in outdoor recreation is undeniable.

9 (b) The legislature further finds that visual and physical access to
10 basic types of open space is vital for everyone, and particularly valu-
11 able to children growing up in "urban hardscapes", or areas where access
12 to nature is limited.

13 (c) The legislature further finds that the development of policies
14 that foster stewardship of the environment, the importance of the wise
15 use of natural resources and recognition of the health benefits of time
16 spent in nature are essential to the residents of New York state. The
17 legislature concludes that this can best be accomplished by the creation
18 of a task force on outdoor environmental education and recreation.

19 § 2. Objectives. A legislative task force on outdoor environmental
20 education and recreation is hereby established to:

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

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1 (a) Promote the development of a framework that will ensure that New
2 York state has an aggressive outdoor environmental education and recre-
3 ation plan for children that focuses on creating, developing and retain-
4 ing opportunities for outdoor play and learning;

5 (b) Identify and support programs which offer safe access to open
6 spaces and summer camp to children from urban areas;

7 (c) Promote the development of policy recommendations to ensure that
8 New York's public and private sectors focus on creating opportunities
9 for underserved and at-risk children to participate in outdoor play and
10 educational experiences;

11 (d) Promote the development of strategies to ensure that K-12 educa-
12 tional institutions develop policies and programs that promote environ-
13 mental education to encourage outdoor play thereby improving public
14 health and take advantage of the physical, mental and spiritual benefits
15 of moving outdoors in nature;

16 (e) Promote the development of strategies to assist community based,
17 nonprofit organizations in furthering programs that provide for summer
18 camp and out of school time opportunities for outdoor recreation or
19 education;

20 (f) Evaluate laws, rules, and procedures to ensure that they facili-
21 tate, or at least do not hinder, the growth of outdoor play or environ-
22 mental education.

23 § 3. Composition. The task force shall consist of twelve members. The
24 task force members will have experience and expertise in outdoor recre-
25 ation and environmental education. The task force shall consist of: the
26 commissioner of education or his or her designee, the commissioner of
27 health or his or her designee, the commissioner of environmental conser-
28 vation or his or her designee, the commissioner of the office of parks,
29 recreation and historic preservation or his or her designee. One member
30 shall be a representative from a nonprofit health and wellness organiza-
31 tion. One member shall be a representative from a nonprofit environ-
32 mental conservation organization. Two members shall be appointed by the
33 governor; one member to be appointed by the temporary president of the
34 senate; one member to be appointed by the minority leader of the senate;
35 one member to be appointed by the speaker of the assembly; and one
36 member to be appointed by the minority leader of the assembly. The task
37 force shall be appointed for a term of two years.

38 § 4. Report. The task force shall report its findings, conclusions and
39 recommendations to the governor, majority leader of the senate and the
40 speaker of the assembly by January 1, 2024. The task force may develop
41 and publish other documents throughout the year as it deems necessary
42 and/or appropriate.

43 § 5. This act shall take effect immediately.