

# STATE OF NEW YORK

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7539

2023-2024 Regular Sessions

## IN ASSEMBLY

May 25, 2023

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Introduced by M. of A. GUNTHER -- read once and referred to the Committee on Governmental Operations

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:

21 (a) Promote the development of a framework that will ensure that New  
22 York state has an aggressive outdoor environmental education and recre-

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

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1 ation plan for children that focuses on creating, developing and retain-  
2 ing opportunities for outdoor play and learning;

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

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

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

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

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

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

36 b. The commissioner of the office of parks, recreation and historic  
37 preservation or his or her designee shall serve as chair of the task  
38 force.

39 c. The members of the task force shall receive no compensation for  
40 their services, but shall be allowed their actual and necessary expenses  
41 incurred in the performance of their duties pursuant to this act.

42 § 4. Report. The task force shall report its findings, conclusions and  
43 recommendations to the governor, majority leader of the senate and the  
44 speaker of the assembly by January 1, 2026. The task force may develop  
45 and publish other documents throughout the year as it deems necessary  
46 and/or appropriate.

47 § 5. This act shall take effect immediately.