STATE OF NEW YORK

1458

2023-2024 Regular Sessions

IN SENATE

January 12, 2023

Introduced by Sens. SERRANO, HINCHEY -- 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:

Section 1. Legislative findings. (a) The legislature hereby finds 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.

(b) The legislature further finds 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.

(c) The legislature further finds that the development of policies that foster stewardship of the environment, the importance of the wise use of natural resources 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 task force on outdoor environmental education and recreation.

§ 2. Objectives. A legislative task force on outdoor environmental 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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(a) Promote the development of a framework that will ensure that New York state has an aggressive outdoor environmental education and recreation plan for children that focuses on creating, developing and retaining opportunities for outdoor play and learning;

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

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

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

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

(f) Evaluate laws, rules, and procedures to ensure that they facilitate, or at least do not hinder, the growth of outdoor play or environmental education.

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

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

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

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

§ 5. This act shall take effect immediately.