

STATE OF NEW YORK

7539

2023-2024 Regular Sessions

IN ASSEMBLY

May 25, 2023

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.