

Aging Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5207

AN ACT EXEMPTING SENIOR CITIZENS FROM THE "PASSPORT TO THE
Title: PARKS FEE".

Vote Date: 3/3/2020

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 2/27/2020

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Aging Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

The bill is intended to exempt senior citizens age sixty-five and older from the 'Passport to the Parks Fee'. Seniors aged 65 and older with a one-year registration renewal must pay an additional \$5 fee each year. With the exemption, Connecticut state parks will lose funding to maintain state parks.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

AARP of Connecticut

AARP of Connecticut expressed support to this bill. The organization mentioned that seniors 65 years old and older with a one-year registration renewal must pay an additional \$5 fee each year. The current structure of the passport to the parks fee unfairly burdens older people.

Eileen Grant, Co-President, Friends of CT State Parks

The Co-President expressed opposition to this bill. She mentioned that the Passport to the Parks Program requires a very modest contribution from citizens in exchange for outsized benefits. A request to exempt senior citizens will negatively impact the program and undermine the Park System's ability to sustain its operations and service its \$10 million patrons.

Eric Hammerling, Executive Director, Connecticut Forest and Park Association

The Executive Director expressed opposition to this bill. He mentioned that exemption for seniors would cut deeply into state parks finances. The improvements in operations and management of state parks is a direct benefit from the passport.

National Audborn Society

The National Audborn Society expressed opposition to this bill. The society mentioned that in order to maintain current revenues at current levels, any exceptions will increase in fees for maintenance of state parks.

Amy Blaymore Paterson, Executive Director, Connecticut Land Conservation Council

The Executive Director expressed opposition to this bill. She mentioned that the Passport to the Parks Program generates revenue to support the operation and maintenance of Connecticut state parks. Allowing the exemption will result in the loss of approximately \$3.4 million in annual support to the state parks system.

David Sutherland, Director of Government Relations, The Nature Conservancy

The Director of Government Relations expressed opposition to this bill. He mentioned that the passport program has proven significantly successful in re-opening campgrounds, and keeping parks well maintained. An exemption will result in a loss of \$3.4 million to \$4million every year.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

The House Republican Caucus

The House Republican Caucus expressed support to this bill. The Caucus mentioned that many seniors struggle financially due to increased fees and taxes. Prior to passport to parks program, seniors were able to enjoy state parks for free.

Sen. George S. Logan, 17th Assembly District

Sen. George S. Logan expressed support to this bill. He mentioned that many seniors struggle with a fixed income and the exemption will provide tax relief.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None Expressed.

**Reported by: Shelby Michelle Williams
Clerk: Gaia McDermott**

Date: 03/10/2020