

Press Release from Friends of LSP and the NY/NJ Baykeeper on the introduction in the NJ Legislature of the LSP Protection Act A-4903 and S-3357

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Bill Introduced by Mukherji and Cunningham Seeks to Protect Liberty State Park

A bill recently introduced in the New Jersey State Legislature will seek to protect Jersey City's Liberty State Park from inappropriate privatization and commercial development plans.

"The Liberty State Park Protection Act," introduced by New Jersey Assemblyman Raj Mukherji (D-Hudson) and Sen. Sandra Cunningham (D-Hudson), seeks to preserve open space at Liberty State Park (LSP) in perpetuity and to protect it against the relentless assaults of inappropriate privatization and commercial development schemes that have plagued this great, free American public commons since it opened in 1976.

The park encompasses more than 1,200 acres--approximately 600 acres of land and 600 acres of water--and contains significant natural, historic, recreational, scenic, and cultural resources. It is a priceless New Jersey and American urban oasis in the middle of densely populated metropolitan northern New Jersey.

More than 5 million people of all ethnicities, religions and cultures visit the park each year to enjoy free outdoor activities together, natural areas, the Nature Center and the historic CRRNJ Terminal with its immigration and transportation history.

The purpose of the Liberty State Park Protection Act is to preserve open space at Liberty State Park (LSP) in perpetuity and to protect it against the relentless assaults of inappropriate privatization and commercial development plans schemes that have plagued this great, free American public commons since it opened in 1976.

The bill (A-4903 and S-3357) also respects LSP's 42-year history of sustained public opposition by caring citizens, putting democracy into action in statewide grassroots battles against privatization and in support of a free and green park.

Protection measures in the bill ensure that the future of Liberty State Park will be guided by a democratic and transparent public participation process in park decision-making and planning. The bill also reinstates and revises an LSP Advisory Committee of park stewards and engages the public and the Committee in the review of any proposals or plans including the mandated creation of a management plan by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection to help guide the park's future. The Act's provisions leave open the possibility of "small scale, park-appropriate privatization plans," which would be subject to public review.

"Liberty State Park is sacred and priceless public land because it is next to our national shrines to democracy, Lady Liberty and Ellis Island and because the park is very scarce urban open space and urban wildlife habitat," said Sam Pesin, President of Friends of Liberty State Park. "LSP is a unique spiritual, natural, open space, historical, recreational and cultural public resource. It is also a priceless public resource in an urban region where every square foot of open space must be protected."

“Most parks don’t require this type of extra protection, but it has proved truly necessary at Liberty State Park,” said Greg Remaud, CEO of NY/NJ Baykeeper. “The money and politics at play along this section of the “Gold Coast” adorned by views of Lady Liberty, has proven too great for any New Jersey administration to just say no to exclusionary private development in the Park. A private golf course, and a second private marina, a private waterpark and motorcross stadium are among the countless destructive and overwhelmingly unpopular schemes that were open to consideration by the State and prevented only by public outcry and activism led by the Friends of Liberty State Park with immense support from thousands of individuals and organizations.”

The bill honors the park’s original intent to transform a desolate waterfront wasteland into a free, green open space envisioned by LSP founder and “father,” Morris Pesin; Audrey Zapp, LSP’s “Godmother”; preservationist Theodore Conrad; and Richard Sullivan, the first NJDEP commissioner.

“We are thankful to Assemblyman Raj Mukherji and Senator Sandra Bolden-Cunningham for introducing this historic bill which is necessary to protect LSP’s future for New Jerseyans and all who visit this treasured park behind Lady Liberty,” said Pesin. “Assemblyman Mukherji’s deep understanding of what LSP means to people’s lives is inspiring and his leadership is crucial at this time in LSP’s long history of battles against harmful privatization plans.”

“We are immensely grateful to the leadership of Assemblyman Raj Mukherji and Senator Sandra Cunningham for introducing the Liberty State Park Protection Act,” said Remaud.

“NY/NJ Baykeeper and the Friends of LSP also are very grateful to the primary sponsors of Assembly bill 4903 - Assemblywoman Angela McKnight and Nicholas Chiaravalloti and co-sponsor of Senate bill 3357 Sen. M. Teresa Ruiz. This will ensure that the Park’s free community green space, panoramic vistas of NY-NJ Harbor and access to Ellis Island and Lady Liberty, that are enjoyed by millions of people locally and from around the world, will be preserved forever.”