

Save Liberty State Park

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Dear Acting-Commissioner McCabe,

We, the undersigned are aware of your strong record in protecting public trust resources and are confident that with your appointment as Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, you will uphold the longstanding mission of maintaining Liberty Park as a free, green, urban oasis for people of all cultures and economic classes to access and enjoy.

The Murphy Administration has committed to prioritizing environmental justice issues, including providing urban communities access to public open space. In addition, we greatly appreciate the recommendation of opposing “further commercialization of Liberty State Park” within the Administration’s Energy and Environment Transition Report.

Liberty State Park is both a state and national gem that hosts 5 million visitors per year, more than any other state park. The “People’s Park” is rich in history and its future exceedingly bright. So, it is unfortunate that before moving forward together with great park initiatives, we must ask you to immediately address two eleventh hour threats to the park deposited by the Christie Administration just as they exited.

We kindly ask you to review and quickly formally reject the leasing away of public land at Liberty State Park for the exclusive private entities – the Dallas-based Suntex yacht marina and an exclusive Liberty National private golf course.

The proposed marina would close off the entire southside of Liberty State Park, reducing waterfront public access for passive recreation and fishing and privatize the already limited amount of free public parking. Many of the park’s most popular and noteworthy amenities would be privatized and off limits to anyone who could not afford pricey marina fees.

The Liberty National Golf Course RFP golf proposal would take away from the public and primarily urban residents Liberty State park’s unique urban Caven Point Natural Area. Destroying the well-documented upland natural habitat at Caven Point Natural

Area preservation and the myriad associated urban environmental education opportunities to enlarge an ultra-exclusive private golf course that charges six digit membership fees is unconscionable.

Caven Point is a 21.5-acre peninsula stretching into the Upper New York Bay. It contains approximately fifteen upland acres including the largest stretch of natural beach in the Upper New York Bay and Hudson River, measuring approximately one-half mile. The remaining 6.5 acres are wetlands and subtidal natural habitat. Caven Point is accessible on foot from Liberty State Park and the surrounding neighborhoods by the Hudson River Walkway that traverses the southwestern border of the site.

For this very reason, Caven Point was acquired using both NJDEP Green Acres and Federal Land and Water Conservation Funds, and is listed on the NJDEPs Natural Area Register.

Some of the environmental education and interpretive offerings at the park include the *Urban Estuary for Young Scientists* program which offers water sampling and testing and scientific research. *Save a Place for Wildlife* is a program geared for a younger audience, which utilizes the Caven Point beach and boardwalk. The program focuses on salt marsh and beach habitats and provides students with an opportunity for hands- on exploration. Other programs include low tide walks, bird walks, volunteer beach cleanups, and stewardship activities such as dune grass planting. For more than a decade between 500-600 children per year have benefitted from this program.

Caven Point Beach provides the unparalleled opportunity for urban school children to view the natural spectacle of annual Horseshoe Crab and Monarch Butterfly migrations up close in their “own backyard.” It is used extensively by the Liberty State Park Interpretive staff for a variety of unique urban environmental education programs.

Students have the opportunity to put on waders and drag a seine net through their home waters. They capture, learn about, and release fish, crabs, seahorses, and other marine life found in our NY/NJ Harbor Estuary.

The location of the site along the Atlantic Flyway and within the harbor estuary makes it an ideal stop for migrating birds. Park visitors have reported eyewitness accounts of notable species including, but not limited to, snowy owl, deer, northern diamondback terrapin, peregrine falcon, osprey, harbor seals, horseshoe crab, yellow-crowned night- heron, black-crowned night-heron, red knot, black skimmer, northern harrier, American oystercatcher, blue heron, horned lark, winter flounder and Atlantic sturgeon.

The site also provides an opportunity for public recreation and eco-tourism. It is a popular visit for bird watchers in the region. Kayakers, small-boat sailors, canoeists, anglers, crabbers, sunbathers, dog walkers as well as wind surfers use the beach and

surrounding tidal flats for recreational access.

An attempt to divert this treasured public land to Liberty National Golf course was first considered around 1990. However, the Friends of Liberty State Park and NY/NJ Baykeeper successfully defeated that attempted public land diversion.

Together, with our statewide allies, if necessary we are prepared to protect Caven Point Natural Area again.

The public overwhelmingly and repeatedly agrees with Sam Pesin, President of the Friends of Liberty State Park when he says,

"Caven Point was bought for eternity to be a natural area for the park and serve people in a densely populated urban area that would otherwise have to travel far away to gain these enriching environmental education experiences. To take this area from the urban public to enrich an exclusive private golf course would be a social and environmental injustice of epic proportion."

Thank you for your consideration, Acting Commissioner, and we look forward to moving past these challenges and working on positive environmental initiatives together with you and NJDEP.

Sincerely,

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Friends of Liberty State Park

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Acting Executive Director
NY/NJ Baykeeper

Eric Stiles
President & CEO
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Jeff Tittel
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Capt. Bill Sheehan
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Tim Dillingham, Executive Director, American Littoral Society
Joe Della Favre, Executive Director, Ironbound Community Corporation
Cindy Ehrenclou, Executive Director, Raritan Headwaters
Carleton Montgomery, Executive Director, Pinelands Preservation Alliance
Sally Rubin, Executive Director, Great Swamp Watershed Association
Ken McNamara, President, CWA Local 1037
Hetty Rosenstein, New Jersey Director, CWA District 1
Doug O'Malley, Director, Environment New Jersey
Cindy Zipf, Executive Director, Clean Ocean Action
Don Stitzenberg, President, Hudson River Waterfront Conservancy
Bill Schultz, Raritan Riverkeeper
Ed Potosnak, Executive Director, NJ League of Conservation Voters
Michele Byers, Executive Director, NJ Conservation Foundation

Peggy Wong, President, Coalition to Preserve the Palisades Cliffs
Maureen Crowley, Harsimus Stem Embankment
Lisa Simms, NJ Tree Foundation
Joe Reynolds, Chair, Bayshore Regional Watershed Council
Heather Fenyk, Executive Director, Lower Raritan Watershed Association
Britta Wenzel, Executive Director, Save Barnegate Bay
Marion Glenn, President, Trustees of Rahway River Watershed Association
Fred Akers, Administrator, Great Egg Harbor Watershed Association
Lori Charkey, Executive Director, Bergen Save the Watershed Action Network
Naomi de la Puente, Executive Director, NJ Environmental Lobby
Emma Melwin, Director, Delaware River Program
Laura Bishop, President, Rancocas Conservancy
Andrew McCurdy, President, Historic Paulus Hook Association
Amy Goldsmith, NJ State Director, Clean Water Action
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Laura Bishop, President, Rancocas Conservancy
Andrew McCurdy, President, Historic Paulus Hook Association
Amy Goldsmith, NJ State Director, Clean Water Action
Laura Skolar, President, Jersey City Parks Coalition
Friends of Arlington Park
Friends of Audubon Park
Bayside Park Neighborhood Association
Canco Park Association
Columbia Park Neighborhood Association
Hamilton Park Conservancy
Historic Jersey City and Harsimus Cemetary
Izetta McDuff Park
Jersey City Reservoir Preservation Alliance
John DeSavlo Playground Community
Lincoln Park West Bergen Neighborhood Association
Pershing Field Garden Friend
Redstone Townhomes Neighborhood Association
Sgt. Anthony Park Association
Summit Cornelison Park Association
Friends of Van Vorst Park
Washington Park Association of Hudson County

West Side Community Alliance

Cc:

Senate President Steve Sweeney

Senate Majority Weinberg

Senator Sandra Cunningham

Senator Brian Stack

Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin

Assembly Whip Raj Muhkerji

Assemblywoman Angela McKnight

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