

Friends of Liberty State Park Statement on LSP Protection Act

The purpose of the Liberty State Park Protection Act is to protect Liberty State Park (LSP) in perpetuity as a sacred, priceless, and inclusive local, state and national public treasure from inappropriate privatization and commercial development and to preserve and improve LSP.

LSP 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. LSP is a unique spiritual, natural, open space, historical, recreational and cultural public resource. LSP is also a mental, emotional and physical health public resource in an urban region where every square foot of open space must be protected.

The Act will protect the true purpose and integrity of this iconic and inspiring American landmark which belongs to all New Jerseyans, all Americans and to future generations as a free and green, inclusive People's Park. and the public's rights to full and free public access to its immeasurable quality of life benefits and magnificent resources.

The LSP Act is a Public Good and Social and Environmental Justice Act. The Act will liberate LSP to be "a free park for a free people" and fulfil its mission, manifest destiny and full potential to bring happiness and inspiration to future generations in "New Jersey's Central Park".

LSP, which opened on Flag Day in 1976 as NJ's Bicentennial gift to America, is a special gift from the People to the People. Over 5 million annual visitors come to

enjoy a multitude of free outdoor activities, natural areas, the Nature Center, and the historic CRRNJ Terminal with its immigration and transportation history.

People of all races, religions and cultural backgrounds enjoy free outdoor activities together. The park is powerful American symbol of the beauty, importance and vitality of the diversity of our great nation. LSP is as powerful a symbol of our democracy as Lady Liberty and Ellis Island are. LSP is America's "front yard" and the urban people's "backyard".

LSP is a peaceful urban haven, oasis, refuge, sanctuary and escape from the densely populated, congested, concrete noisy urban region and is a secular cathedral for everyone in our stressful modern society to clear their heads, calm down, relax, refresh, recharge and renew their spirits.

The Act is necessary and overdue to protect this invaluable public asset because LSP has repeatedly been under assault by exclusionary, destructive and overwhelmingly unpopular privatization and commercialization proposals since the park opened. Those wrong-headed plans would have taken away public open space, severely harmed the public's use and enjoyment of the park, and subverted the park's true purpose. It has been a travesty that the forces of Civic Good have needed to fight battle after battle for 4 decades.

The Act honors LSP's original intent, envisioned by LSP's founders, Morris Pesin, LSP's "father", Audrey Zapp, LSP's "godmother", the preservationist Theodore Conrad and the first NJDEP Commissioner Richard Sullivan, of a desolate waterfront wasteland of abandoned railyards and decaying piers being transformed into a beautiful free and green family park behind Lady Liberty; and also the Act

respects the LSP's 42-year history of sustained public opposition by caring citizens putting democracy into action in statewide grassroots battles against privatization and commercialization as expressed in public hearings, countless public comments, petitions, and in a series of coalitions of local, regional, and statewide groups. The privatization plans desecrated LSP's special meaning as the neighbor of Lady Liberty and Ellis Island and attacked the quality of life of urban families.

The Act's protection includes ensuring that LSP's future will be guided by a democratic and transparent public participation process in park decision-making and planning. The Act establishes a public process for any privatization lease of one year or more, reinstates and revises a LSP Advisory Committee of park stewards, and engages the public and the Committee in the review of plans and creation of a management plan to help guide and improve LSP's future.

The Act allows for small-scale, park-appropriate privatization leases and any lease for a year or longer would require a public participation process. Though LSP already brings in revenue from the marina/restaurant leases, the ferry contract and periodic well-planned weekend admission-fee events, the vast majority has repeatedly emphasized that LSP is a park and rejected promised revenue in return for giving away precious, irreplaceable land. "The Star Ledger" editorial on 4/27/03, stated, "parks are not supposed to make money. They are supposed to provide green oases, particularly in densely packed urban areas like Hudson County. That's why parks, a common public good, are supported by taxes."

This Act will lead to the democratic collaboration of the state, public involvement and caring elected officials, and will ensure the blossoming and wise shaping of the future of this special place on earth.