

Friends of LSP Statement on the Billionaire Paul Fireman Liberty State Park Privatization and Commercialization Bill – which casts aside the Protection Act and the 46 years of the Voice of the People

Billionaire Paul Fireman's bill shouldn't decide the future of LSP – as Senate Bill 2807 leaves the door wide open for large scale privatization and/or commercialization plans including his land grab of the Caven Point Natural Area.

The Friends are excited about the sponsors providing \$250 million for LSP – BUT ONLY if it funds free public improvements and isn't tied to any large-scale privatization/commercialization plans. Their mailer flyer shows they want to use it for commercial venues which will destroy public access to LSP by the inevitable traffic jams and taking away of free parking spaces.

We urge the legislature to merge both bills because it is time once and for all, with LSP turning 46 years old on 6/14 to protect LSP as a free park for future generations. **At a minimum, we urge the sponsors to include this language:** Large scale privatization and large-scale commercialization would be prohibited in LSP and only small-scale commercial activities would be allowed. The Caven Point Natural Area would be fully protected from privatization there will be robust public participation in all park land use decisions including public hearings on a weeknight and on Saturdays and at least a 30 day public comment period" and merging the composition of the Protection Act committee with Fireman's bill's task force. His bill includes the head of his phony front group who admitted being funded by Fireman and has pushed lies and smear attacks for two years.. A billionaire wanting to privatize LSP's Caven Point should not have a seat on a LSP task force.

The \$250 million in the Fireman bill threatens LSP's future by its total failure to include protections against large scale privatization or include robust public participation. LSP needs the Protection Act's language and we praise Asm Raj Mukherji, the Act's great champion.

We condemn the abandonment of the protections and robust public participation language in the LSP Protection Act A1957/S907. LSP's protection is overdue and essential to protect the entire national treasure park behind Lady Liberty from large scale privatization plans including protecting LSP's Caven Point Natural Area Migratory Bird Habitat and Nesting Area.

The Fireman bill, most likely written by Fireman's lobbyist, obscenely leaves LSP as vulnerable as ever to more privatization assaults. The bill totally ignores the overwhelming 46 year of the clear and strong Voice of the People against large scale privatization and commercialization of the park.

A major red flag hidden in the Fireman bill is its calling for "Revenue Generation" in section 4a(2) d. Their use of "revenue generation" is their **code word** for LSP privatization.

There is also a phrase calling LSP an "economic resource". LSP is a park and not an economic development zone. The LSP Protection Act does allow for small scale commercial activities such as ice skating, food vendors, after hours use of the Terminal, bike and kayak rentals, etc.

Another major problem is its last section, section 7, which states that the \$250 million can only be spent on what the task force "identifies" for recreation and wildlife habitats. That means that the money can't be used for anything else - like the transportation access mentioned in the bill which would involve shuttle buses and also needed parking spaces and the very limited use of the \$250 million in Section 7 would prohibit the money being used for the restoration of the CRRNJ Sheds for public use (there's asbestos in the concrete roof), or other park improvements.

The overwhelming broad public consensus has always been against privatization of LSP, **no matter what revenue was promised.** LSP pre-covid, was making about \$3 million a year from leases to the ferry company and marina and from special events.

As the Star Ledger editorial of 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 is why parks, as a common public good, are supported by taxes".

Their bill starts with a description of the **1978 Master Plan** which included free active recreation and stated that "the core of LSP should be designed in the naturalist tradition of America's great pastoral landscape parks. **The Master Plan did not call for "revenue generation"** and the only privatization it mentioned was a couple of restaurants and shops and stands catering to boating and fishing supplies

The bill also totally ignores the current Protection Act grassroots support with 111 Coalition groups, 32K petition signatures and powerful editorials for the way overdue Act. It is diabolical for Fireman to use his influence to write a special interest bill which serves his only goal of leaving the door wide open for his privatizing Caven Point for golf holes, or any other privatizer's assault on LSP .The LSP Protection Act's (A1957/S907) language effectively protects LSP, and allows for small scale commercial activities.

Fireman will use this version of a task force to push through privatization plans. The Fireman bill's committee should be merged with Asm Raj Mukherji's amended "advisory committee." The composition of the advisory committee in both bills should be merged, but shouldn't include Fireman's front group who admitted being funded by him, and who has pushed lies about the Protection Act and supports privatization including the golf course expansion into LSP.

To respect the decades of privatization opposition and protect this priceless park for future generations, Fireman's bill must be merged with Asm Mukherji's essential Protection Act bill – especially language from sections 4 and 5 of A1957.