

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2025

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HOUSE BILL 688

Short Title: Funds for Inclusive Playgrounds. (Public)

Sponsors: Representatives R. Pierce, Cotham, Almond, and Hawkins (Primary Sponsors).
For a complete list of sponsors, refer to the North Carolina General Assembly web site.

Referred to: Rules, Calendar, and Operations of the House

April 3, 2025

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT TO PROVIDE CONTINUING APPROPRIATIONS TO THE PARKS AND
RECREATION TRUST FUND FOR INCLUSIVE PLAYGROUNDS.

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

SECTION 1. G.S. 143B-135.56 reads as rewritten:

"§ 143B-135.56. Parks and Recreation Trust Fund.

(a) Fund Created. – There is established a Parks and Recreation Trust Fund in the State Treasurer's Office. The Trust Fund shall be a special revenue fund consisting of donations, gifts, and devises to the Trust Fund and other monies appropriated to the Trust Fund by the General Assembly.

(b) Use. – Funds in the Trust Fund are annually appropriated to the North Carolina Parks and Recreation Authority and, unless otherwise specified by the General Assembly or the terms or conditions of a gift or grant, shall be allocated and used as follows:

(1) Sixty-five percent (65%) for the State Parks System or a State recreational forest for capital projects, repairs and renovations of park facilities, and land acquisition.

(2) Thirty percent (30%) to provide matching funds to local governmental units or public authorities as defined in G.S. 159-7 on a dollar-for-dollar basis for local park and recreation purposes. The appraised value of land that is donated to a local government unit or public authority may be applied to the matching requirement of this subdivision. These funds shall be allocated by the North Carolina Parks and Recreation Authority based on criteria patterned after the Open Project Selection Process established for the Land and Water Conservation Fund administered by the National Park Service of the United States Department of the Interior. Funds appropriated for inclusive parks facilities under subsection (h) of this section shall be awarded separately and not be counted toward the percentage cap set forth in this subdivision.

(3) Five percent (5%) for the Coastal and Estuarine Water Beach Access Program.

(c) Geographic Distribution. – In allocating funds in the Trust Fund under this section, the North Carolina Parks and Recreation Authority shall make geographic distribution across the State to the extent practicable.

(d) Administrative Expenses. – Of the funds appropriated to the North Carolina Parks and Recreation Authority from the Trust Fund each year, no more than three percent (3%) may be used by the Department for operating expenses associated with managing capital improvements projects, acquiring land, and administration of local grants programs.



(e) Operating Expenses for State Parks System Allocations. – In allocating funds in the Trust Fund under subdivision (1) of subsection (b) of this section, the North Carolina Parks and Recreation Authority shall consider the operating expenses associated with each capital project, repair and renovation project, and each land acquisition. In considering the operating expenses, the North Carolina Parks and Recreation Authority shall determine both:

- (1) The minimal anticipated operating expenses, which are determined by the minimum staff and other operating expenses needed to maintain the project.
- (2) The optimal anticipated operating budget, which is determined by the level of staff and other operating expenses required to achieve a more satisfactory level of operation under the project.

(f) Reports. – The North Carolina Parks and Recreation Authority shall report no later than October 1 of each year to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Agriculture and Natural and Economic Resources, the Fiscal Research Division, and the Environmental Review Commission on allocations from the Trust Fund from the prior fiscal year. For funds allocated from the Trust Fund under subsection (c) of this section, this report shall include the operating expenses determined under subdivisions (1) and (2) of subsection (e) of this section.

(g) Debt. – The Authority may allocate up to fifty percent (50%) of the portion of the annual appropriation identified in subdivision (b)(1) of this section to reimburse the General Fund for debt service on special indebtedness to be issued or incurred under Article 9 of Chapter 142 of the General Statutes for the purposes provided in subdivision (b)(1) of this section and for waterfront access. In order to allocate funds for debt service reimbursement, the Authority must identify to the State Treasurer the specific parks projects for which it would like special indebtedness to be issued or incurred and the annual amount it intends to make available, and request the State Treasurer to issue or incur the indebtedness. After special indebtedness has been issued or incurred for a parks project requested by the Authority, the Authority must credit to the General Fund each year the actual aggregate principal and interest payments to be made in that year on the special indebtedness, as identified by the State Treasurer.

(h) Continuing Appropriation for Inclusive Playgrounds. – The General Assembly finds that there is a critical need in this State for construction of special parks facilities or adaptation of existing parks facilities for persons with disabilities, and therefore it is essential that the State provide continuing dedicated funding to the Trust Fund for this purpose. Therefore, there is appropriated from the General Fund to the Trust Fund in each fiscal year the sum of one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000) to be used for grants to local governmental units, public school units, or public authorities, as defined in G.S. 159-7, for construction of special facilities or adaptation of existing facilities that meet the unique needs of persons with disabilities or that enable them to participate in recreational and sporting activities, regardless of their abilities. Grants made under this subsection shall not exceed five thousand dollars (\$5,000), and the local governmental unit, public school unit, or public authority receiving a grant under this subsection shall provide matching funds in the amount of one dollar (\$1.00) of local funds for every five dollars (\$5.00) of State funds."

SECTION 2. This act becomes effective July 1, 2025.