

June 3, 2024

Representative/Senator [NAME]

Address

Madison, WI 53708

To the Honorable [Representative/Senator]:

On behalf of the Milwaukee County Commission on Aging, I am writing to request your support for the option to purchase lifetime admissions passes to Wisconsin State Parks, Forests, and Recreation Areas for older adults.

Wisconsin is home to nationally recognized nature areas. Our system has 36 state parks and recreation areas, spanning more than 60,570 acres and 14 state forests, totaling more than 471,329 acres. Of these, there is only one state park and one state forest in Milwaukee County. To visit any other of these assets, residents must travel outside the County, and public transportation options are extremely limited. As a result, purchasing a vehicle admission sticker is mandatory in most cases. On top of an admissions fee, some areas require the purchase of a trail pass for certain activities.

Historically, Wisconsin residents aged 65 and older could make a one-time purchase of a "Senior Citizen Recreation Card," which provided lifetime admission to state parks. Wisconsin State Statute § 29.624 ("Senior citizen recreation card") describes this practice, which allowed the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) the option to provide lifetime state park admissions, a fishing license, small game hunting license, and other benefits upon payment of the one-time fee. After 1991, this program ended. The Wisconsin DNR provides reduced and free admissions to its amenities to some populations in some circumstances, but the only program that is substantially similar to this card is for disabled veterans and former prisoners of war.

However, offering a one-time purchase lifetime pass is provided by the United States Federal Government. U.S. residents aged 62 and older can make a one-time purchase of a lifetime Senior Pass that provides admission to recreation sites managed by the National Park Service, US Fish & Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, US Forest Service, and US Army Corp of Engineers.

Access to state parks, forests, and recreation areas is critical to the health and wellbeing of all, but especially older adults who tend to experience greater levels of social isolation and loneliness than other populations. Encouraging Wisconsin's older adults to seek out wellness activities outside and in nature helps promote improved physical and mental health.

In particular, Milwaukee County's older adults do not have equal access to parks and green spaces compared to other parts of the state. While some may live in walking distance to a park or live in an area safe enough to walk in, some do not have the ability to walk in their own neighborhood. Providing easier access to the state's parks forests, and recreation areas allows those who may not have the opportunity to spend time in nature the chance to experience its health benefits.

To support the health and wellbeing of Wisconsin's older adults, particularly those in Milwaukee County, we ask that you support the reinstatement of Senior Citizen Recreation Cards, or one-

time purchase lifetime admission passes to Wisconsin State Parks, Forests, and Recreation Areas for those aged 60 and older.

As Milwaukee County's aging population continues to grow, the Milwaukee County Commission on Aging supports legislation that helps older adults age well in their homes and communities and supports our mission to achieve racial and health equity. In the interest of the older adults that we serve and that you represent in Milwaukee County, we hope you will support, and urge your colleagues to support, this initiative.

Sincerely,

Janice Wilberg, Ph.D.
Chair, Commission on Aging

Brian Peters
Legislative Officer, Commission on Aging