

New Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation commissioner eyes long tenure with new administration after turnover at the top

By Chris Van Buskirk | May 12, 2023



Department of Conservation and Recreation Commissioner Brian Arrigo speaks at a press conference in August 2020, when he was still mayor of Revere.

New Department of Conservation and Recreation Commissioner Brian Arrigo said he wants to be the “longest serving” person in the role after a report released Friday pointed out turnover at the top of the department within the last decade.

A report from Save the Harbor/Save the Bay and the Metropolitan Beaches Commission said there have been six DCR commissioners in the past eight years, which has led to a lack of “leadership continuity, clear direction, and accountability at the top.”

The Department is tasked with managing the 450,000 acres that make up the state’s parks system.

DCR commissioners, the report said, often made promises or commitments that they were then not around to keep.

Arrigo, the former mayor of Revere, is only three weeks into his new job as commissioner but, at a Friday morning event, said he has heard from staff who are excited to have a new commissioner, “who has been appointed by a new

governor, who will be around for a little while.”

“I look forward to the work ahead. I hope to be the longest-serving DCR commissioner. I know that’s not all that long,” he said. “[DCR] can be the most powerful engine in state government. I talked about climate and equity and public

health and economic opportunity. All of those important issues ... the Department of Conservation and Recreation sits in the middle of all that.”

Arrigo said DCR’s new vision around spaces, beaches, and parks will “kind of alleviate any fear that people have about continuity or about leadership.”

Both the Metropolitan Beaches Commission and Save the Harbor/Save the Bay said they look forward to addressing systemic problems and implement long-term solutions that the DCR commissioner “may not be around to solve.”

“We are counting on the governor and her administration to set policy and

hold the agency, and not just the commissioner, accountable over time,” members of the commission wrote in a letter released Friday alongside the report.

The report said Massachusetts has the lowest state and local government per capita spending on parks and recreation in the country.

That comes as DCR’s budget has been reduced by about 30% over the last 15 years, Save the Harbor/Save the Bay Executive Director Chris Mancini told the Herald on Thursday.

Gov. Maura Healey has proposed increasing the department’s funding by 12% to \$149.9 million in her fiscal 2024 state budget proposal. The Senate proposed funding the department at \$148.7 million and the House suggested roughly \$147 million.

Arrigo said he is working with lawmakers to keep the increases in the final state budget.

“And at that point, it’ll be up to us to kind of prove that that investment is worth it,” he said. “I think everyone here understands that that kind of investment is important.”