

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION OF:

MARYLAND HOUSE BILL 1098
HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
MARCH 5, 2020 AT 1:00 PM

SUBMITTED ON MARCH 5, 2020 AND BY:

CHARISSA E. THOMAS
29470 MOUNT VERNON ROAD
PRINCESS ANNE, MD 21853

Dear Committee Members:

I am Charissa Thomas, and my family and I reside in Somerset County, Maryland. I am speaking to oppose Maryland House Bill 1098. The reason I oppose this Bill is because it will remove the funding for any synthetic surfaces in parks. The removal to use State funding for projects that include these surfaces would no longer be inclusive for all children and adults. Specifically, it would remove the opportunity for inclusive parks to be created and maintained for everyone of every ability. Having your family to be able to enjoy your local community park should be a standard for everyone, not just for the communities that do not need help with state funding, or for the children/adults that are fortunate enough to not have a special need, either physical or sensory.

I am the mother to a set of fraternal twin girls born at 25 weeks 3 days gestation. Our twins were given a 5% chance of survival. Now, almost 3.5 years later, our younger of the twins is living with CP, hydrocephalous and Epilepsy. She is unable to walk on her own. She uses a gait trainer, a walker or an adaptive stroller to be active. Her twin is a typical 3-year-old when it comes to her physical abilities, but she does live with quite a few sensory needs. There is no playground in our county that both of my children can play on independently and with their peers. Emerson needs a synthetic surface in order to safely move around a playground and just play as a child. Elle needs the synthetic surface as typical grass is a sensory overload and she is unable to just play on it. Children learn through play, it is one of the major vehicles through which they integrate knowledge, feelings and skills. Why would we want to exclude children who are already living with different abilities from the basic right to play on a playground. Think about when you watch your children, family members play. The laughter, the smiles, the pure joy. Now picture yourself as a parent or family member of a child with special needs. You don't get to experience that, if there is no inclusive playground then not everyone gets to have the joy from being pushed in a swing, the butterflies when they get to go high and touch the sky. It is for these reasons that I support the opposition of this Bill and look forward to the opportunity of more projects like Project 7 ½ and the inclusive playground to be state funded.

If you are in support of all children having the right to play, and play independently regardless of their daily challenges, then I urge you to oppose Bill 1098.

Sincerely,

Charissa Thomas