

Hello. My name is Liz Metz. I am an Adapted Physical Education Teacher here in Maryland. I am also the mother of two elementary-aged students. As one who grew up in Maryland and continues to live here, I have had the opportunity to play and enjoy what our schools have to offer. My children come home daily raving about their new school and the wonderful new recess equipment. However, in my position as a Teacher Specialist I get to travel the county and the state observing many students and programs. This affords me the opportunity to also see various playgrounds our schools have to offer. The disparity of play equipment from school to school and county to county is clear, but also the accessibility of the equipment is even more profound. Delegate Belcastro's School Wellness and Recess Grant Program is a simple start to help bridge the gap in opportunities for play and movement within the state, but even more so to heighten the accessibility to ALL students in Maryland so they have an equal opportunity to be a kid, have some fun and move.

Recently I was an observer in the process of playground bids for multiple schools. Traveling around to different playgrounds, hearing how one plans and chooses play equipment and products was a foreign experience. I had never looked up the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission Public Playground Safety Handbook, or the MSDE Facilities Guidebook that hasn't been updated since 2011 or the Summary of Accessibility Guidelines for Play Areas by the U.S. Access Board. Becoming familiar with these resources and what our students SHOULD have compared to what they DO have makes me see playgrounds in a brand-new light. I look for ramps and landings including edge protection, cross slope, surfaces, and outdoor conditions. I now look to see if there are accessible routes that connect all entry and exit points of accessible play components and I even sigh when I see mulch. Never did I think of mulch as a negative aspect in a playground- that is until you have a student in a wheelchair who wants to independently navigate.

I respectfully urge your favorable report of Delegate Belcastro's House Bill 573 to help improve the play and movement opportunities and accessibility for all Maryland students.