



**KABOOM! Testimony in Support of HB 694
Governor's Office for Children - ENOUGH Act of 2024
House Appropriations Committee
February 28, 2024**

KABOOM! is the national nonprofit whose mission is to eliminate playspace inequity in historically disinvested communities across the country. As a result of historical laws and policies which were racially biased, like red-lining, discriminatory educational investment, and denial of commercial lending to minority business owners, many residential Black and brown communities do not have access to outdoor recreational spaces and playgrounds. Play and physical activity are vital to children's physical, emotional, and social development—and without access to the infrastructure that supports these activities—they are more likely to develop health conditions like obesity, anxiety, cardio-vascular disease, diabetes, and depression.

Our approach to addressing this challenge is to not only encourage greater investment in these communities but to advance principles of co-design and co-creation of the playspaces with the community. We do this through an inclusive design process that centers community voices and then invite the community to return as volunteers who help install the playground during the construction phase. By placing the community at the heart of this process we are ensuring a sense of ownership and belonging within the space they co-create.

This approach is even more important when allocating public funding to historically disinvested communities and that is why KABOOM! **supports** the Moore Administration's ENOUGH Grant Program Act of 2024. By creating a new grant program that places the individuals and groups that are often most impacted by state funding decisions at the center of the process, the Moore Administration is taking an important step towards creating a more equitable funding ecosystem.

This approach will also get people more engaged with their government. Civic engagement is a necessary step in fostering a more empowered community which can then exercise an increasing degree of agency over the political and governmental process. This not only leads to a more informed citizenry but one that is also better able to resist misinformation or other attacks on our democratic process. KABOOM! has long acknowledged the benefits of a community-based model of design and work. In cities like Chicago, this approach helped reduce violence in the Pullman neighborhood on the city's southside.

In Uvalde, this process has helped spark healing following the mass-shooting event which shook that community to its core. And in Baltimore, educators are seeing the transformative power of a playground on the mental health of their students when they feel a sense of belonging which comes from helping design and build the playspace.

We hope that this grant program can serve as a model for other funding streams in the future. While participatory grant making should not replace the current method of

allocating moat public funds, there are ways to make some existing streams more responsive to residents' wishes and this program can serve as an important proof of concept for this approach.