



KABOOM! Public Testimony in Support of HB 1147 “No More Toxic Playgrounds”

KABOOM! is the national nonprofit whose mission is to end playspace inequity in communities across the country. Playspace inequity in cities, like other forms of inequity, stems from the racially biased housing, education, and infrastructure investment policies that shaped federal, state, and local government decision making during the 19th and much of the 20th centuries. Baltimore has been especially impacted by these historically racist policy practices and that is why KABOOM! has been working there for over two decades with residents, local government leaders, and community-based organizations seeking to address the lack of access to high-quality, engaging, and safe playspaces.

KABOOM! believes it is not enough to just have access to a playspace in historically disinvested communities, the playspaces that are installed must also be high-quality, safe, and provide the children who use them with a sense of belonging. HB 1147 takes an important step in achieving this vision by ensuring the playgrounds in the state of Maryland will be safe for all children. Play surface areas should be free of toxic materials and children’s exposure to them should be eliminated. Unfortunately, many playgrounds currently use rubber surfaces made from recycled tires which contain chemicals that are hazardous to children. The reason many of these surfaces were used was to increase access to the playgrounds for children of different abilities, especially those who faced mobility challenges. Non-toxic wood chip surfaces pose significant challenges to children needing assistive devices and therefore limits their access to play.

While the intent behind the use of rubber safety surfacing is commendable, the unintended consequences contain significant downside. Not only will this legislation correct this mistake, but it will also help foster a marketplace for play surfaces, like cork, which are both inclusive and environmentally safe. The more innovation we can spur in enhancing safe and inclusive playgrounds the better off are our children.

This legislation has been amended from its original version to address the cost and timeline concerns of many of the agencies we partner with across Maryland. Because of those changes KABOOM! is now able to support this legislation. It is our expectation that as more recreation departments and school districts use their procurement power to purchase environmentally safe surfaces in the future, the cost of alternative playspace surfaces will go down as a result of the economies of scale that result from increased demand.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments on this legislation.