

Testimony of George Matysik

Executive Director of the Philadelphia Parks Alliance

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Good morning. My name is George Matysik, Executive Director of the Philadelphia Parks Alliance—the organization dedicated to improving the lives of Philadelphians through our public spaces.

As you know, Philadelphia Parks and Recreation receives the bulk of its funds from local sources—not from the Commonwealth. And as a city, we've been able to bolster the funding for our public spaces with private investment—through groups like the Fairmount Park Conservancy, PHS, and the Parks Alliance—plus local support. Still our Parks and Recreation system receives among the lowest amount of dollars per acre or person—of major cities.

The fact is, in cities like Philadelphia, our public spaces play a frontline role in reducing poverty and promoting economic development. More than one out of three of kids in our city are living below the poverty rate, and this is an issue we need to address NOW and with our full attention.

Every day, I see how parks, rec centers, and libraries are essential to making Philadelphia a more equitable city.

At Kingsessing Rec Center in South West Philly, the Roadrunners athletic program has not only promoted fitness and social skills, but see 80% of their kids had better grades in school after joining the team.

At the Free Library's branches throughout the city, unemployed residents are given resources to find jobs.

At Christy Rec Center in West Philly, middle school girls are signing up for a science program that intends to increase the number of black women in STEM.

These programs continue to run, despite the fact that the buildings' roofs have been leaking for years, the concrete is cracked and hazardous, and the entrances aren't safe for our elders or disabled. So many of these valued community spaces are in disrepair. Imagine the possibilities of public infrastructure that encourages communities to grow.

And the fact is, these investments work. After Hunting Park received a capital makeover, they saw crime drop by more than 80% in the surrounding community, and now see obesity rates significantly lower than the neighboring communities.

This is about so much more than trees, sports, and books. This is about investing in the spaces that will improve the quality of life for our residents in neighborhoods that need it the most.

It's as simple as this: we can invest in our kids—or we can invest in soda. There's not much more to it than that.