

TO: The Montgomery County Council

FROM: Randolph Civic Association (RCA)

RE: Public Hearing Notice on Board of Health Regulation to Prevent the Spread of Covid-19 in Montgomery County

DATE: March 11, 2021

My name is Josh Silverstein. I am currently the President of the Randolph Civic Association or the RCA. The RCA represents over 1340 households in the North Bethesda triangular area bounded by Randolph Road, Nicholson Lane/CSX tracks, and Rock Creek. The RCA communicates regularly with our residents through our Echo print newsletter - delivered free of charge to all of our residents since 1956. In addition, the RCA holds monthly meetings. Through these efforts, community events, and word-of-mouth, our community is kept well-informed and interested.

As County Executive Elrich, in consultation with County Health Officer Dr. Gayles and the Montgomery County Council, considers a new Executive Order, the RCA requests reconsideration of the current restrictions with respect to outdoor basketball courts throughout the County. We want to be clear in our testimony: **we understand the need for certain COVID-19 restrictions.**

We have recently interacted with Montgomery County Parks and Councilmember Navarro's office about COVID-19 restrictions related to basketball throughout the County. Most parks had their basketball hoops and/or nets removed by Montgomery Parks at some point in the last year. The RCA was told by both Parks and Councilmember Navarro's office that a change to the current Executive Order would be required to replace basketball hoops and nets in Montgomery County Parks. We have described our rationale and proposal below.

**Comparable activities are happening in parks and residents need to be responsible in all situations**

Our position is that there are certain basketball activities that have a similar risk level to tennis and roller sports, which are permissible under the current restrictions. For example, someone could shoot at a basketball hoop or a hockey goal alone without being in close contact with others. However, basketball is a more accessible activity to communities like ours given the relative cost of a basketball vs. a tennis racket and balls or roller hockey equipment.

Like all matters during the COVID-19 public health emergency, there is significant personal responsibility that needs to be applied by residents. For example, children at playgrounds are often in close proximity to each other but they are required to wear masks beyond a certain age. Also, when someone at the grocery store gets too close, one can politely ask them for additional space or leave the area. Our question is why can this concept not be applied to basketball?

**The sources used in the Maryland's Sports Commission Report are conflicting**

Section 6(l)(1)-(2) of County Executive Elrich's most recent Executive Order incorporates by reference the Maryland's Sports Commissions Return to Play Committee Report ([https://marylandsports.us/sites/default/files/Return2Play/MDSports\\_ReturntoPlay%20Report.pdf](https://marylandsports.us/sites/default/files/Return2Play/MDSports_ReturntoPlay%20Report.pdf)). While we understand that basketball is classified as a high-risk activity in this report, it has the exact same reopening schedule as playgrounds (see pages 17-18). Additionally, the Aspen Institute's COVID-19 risk assessment tool ([https://marylandsports.us/sites/default/files/Return2Play/Return-to-Play\\_Final\\_5.19.2020.pdf](https://marylandsports.us/sites/default/files/Return2Play/Return-to-Play_Final_5.19.2020.pdf)), which is referenced by the Maryland's Sports Commission, only classifies "team or large group pickup play with non-household members and shared balls" as high risk, whereas drilling and shooting with household members at outdoor courts are considered to be a low risk activity. Such low-moderate risk activities are those that we have in mind.

### **Basketball is now being played indoors at County facilities**

On March 1, 2021, Montgomery County Recreation announced the reopening of nine recreation centers (<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/rec/activitiesandprograms/recfit/>). In addition to the open gym options, Montgomery County Recreation is now holding indoor basketball classes. We acknowledge that indoor basketball is only occurring upon reservation. That being said, a reservation system does not change the risk level of the underlying activity. The standard is not being applied equally across the board. If basketball is safe to be played indoors, it should not be prohibited to be played outside.

### **Conclusion**

The RCA requests that the County Executive's updated Executive Order allow for some basketball activities to occur outdoors at Montgomery County Parks. We understand the need for COVID-19 restrictions on sports and are not advocating for full court basketball to be legal at this time. Rather, we are requesting that the updated Executive Order authorizes Montgomery County Parks to replace basketball hoops and nets and allow for residents to conduct basketball drills and shoot hoops with household members at outdoor courts.

The RCA thanks the County Executive and County Council for consideration of this matter and we hope that our residents will again be able to safely enjoy the sport of basketball. Thank you.

Respectfully,

Josh Silverstein  
President  
Randolph Civic Association