I write to ask you to carefully consider the cuts in the Department of Recreation's budget that have been proposed in the County Executive's FY 2022 Operating Budget. I believe that those cuts should be substantially reversed.

As you know, the pandemic has had a very negative effect on our community recreation centers. Most have been able to provide, at best, only a very limited set of services.

Our community centers play an absolutely vital role in the life of the County. Every center provides welcome recreation services, but they also provide other services, including exercise programs for senior citizens, educational programs for children and adults alike. They host community meetings and they provide internet access.

Several, like my neighborhood's Coffield Center are located in historically under-served communities with significant minority populations and the value of these centers to their communities is immeasurable. Generally, I think that the centers provide more value to our more at-risk neighbors, than they do to more wealthy neighbors and in a year during which the county has promised to look at every policy through an equity lens, special attention should be paid to the centers.

I believe that the County Executive's proposed operating budget responds to the cuts in service made necessary by the pandemic with the budget cuts mentioned above. However, it is likely - fingers crossed - that the centers will start to reopen later this spring or summer. At this point, the Department's expenditures will rapidly increase. I would argue therefore, that the operating budget should fund the Department at a level that takes into account these future increases in spending. Moreover, when the centers do open up, many of their front facing staff with medical leaves will be working from home, requiring the Department to hire many temporary staff, thereby increasing the Department's total expenditures. When considering the Department's budget please anticipate and fund these developing needs.

–Roger Paden