

****Larry's Testimony ****

****My name is Larry R. and I'm an accountant with a practice in Montgomery County and I am blessed with two children, two sons who are autistic, or more properly, on different stages of the autistic spectrum. The two boys love to play ball as do their parents with them. But when I take the family to a park such as the new one being built in Silver Spring, and indeed all other parks in Montgomery County, it nearly breaks our hearts.****

****At every one of these parks, you can see at once that there are plenty of ballplaying facilities for typical children. The average youngster or teen can wait in line to play tennis, basketball, soccer and the rest. But these are all team sports with opponents. They are not independent or individualized sports so that my boys can drop-in and participate along with everyone else in the community. This is understood as mainstreaming which does not exist apart from programs which further segregated and segment differently able populations.****

****Why do all the typical kids get ballplaying facilities so much so that many of them are empty like the tennis courts being built for fewer and fewer participants. The point is there are many drop-in facilities: sports courts and sports fields for everyone but not for kids who are physically and cognitively challenged or mobility impaired or in wheelchairs or have other disabilities. They too should have drop-in ball playing sports to drop in with their family to play together and interact with others. There are none. What's the point of a ramp leading to discrimination and exclusion which characterizes the new Silver Spring Park designed with little thought to including the differently able. They are neglected willfully by a kind of callous indifference on the part of the authorities.****

**** It's very sad and I speak not only for my own family. I'm certain i speak also for many of Montgomery County's differently able children and adults who would also like to play ball at a facility but not with opponents, and not with teams, "a sport that does not require offense and defense but actively move their bodies, and are presented with sports challenges that they can succeed at, that socialize and mainstream's all populations. We need to be giving consideration to diversity and the integration of special populations into a community activity. These Montgomery parks offer accessibility when they should be offering inclusion." {THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR RECREATIONAL EQUALITY website}****

**** The only glimmer of hope is that of the Bankshot court in King Farm Rockville that brings a community together and includes the differently able. I wish officialdom would visit some weekend. Why so few of these and others like it? There ought to be many such affordances in the community addressing the needs of the total community rather than merely the jocks and athletes. All families blessed with all kinds of children should have drop-in facilities to play ball just like other typical children and not always aggressive and having to defeat rivals but by playing alongside one another, not against one another, where, as I heard said, "you don't have to win to be a winner," [NARE] Rather, it is participation alongside others in mainstreaming disabled that brings a community together. There are many of us who would like to see attention paid to those who are so underserved in our parks. The parks of M.C. from the perspective of my family and many others are sadly disappointing.****