



City of Baltimore

City Council
City Hall, Room 408
100 North Holliday Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

Legislation Text

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INTRODUCTORY*

CITY OF BALTIMORE
COUNCIL BILL R
(Resolution)

Introduced by: President Rawlings-Blake

A RESOLUTION ENTITLED

A COUNCIL RESOLUTION concerning
Request for Budget Action - Recreation and Parks - Restoration of Funding for Recreation Centers

FOR the purpose of requesting the Mayor to restore funding for recreation centers, child care centers, Police Athletic League Centers (PAL), and City pools in the Fiscal Year 2010 budget and urging the Police Commissioner to work with the Director of Recreation and Parks to maintain a police presence in former Police Athletic League Centers.

Recitals

The Department of Recreation and Parks recommended Fiscal 2010 budget statement reflects significant changes in the management and operation of City recreation facilities, resulting in an overall increase in the structured recreational programming for children and youth. While this reorganization will result in an overall increase of centers, it will also mean the closure of several recreation centers, childcare centers, PAL centers, and pools, as well as the conversion of the remaining PAL centers into recreation centers.

Even in financially troubled times, the large number of negative influences presented daily to Baltimore's youth necessitates a renewed emphasis on recreation centers and other entities charged with shepherding our children. The importance of constructive activities and supervised play cannot be understated, particularly to youth in socioeconomically disadvantaged neighborhoods. The Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Program was created within the National Recreation and Park Association, recognizing that urban parks and recreational facilities often serve the most at-risk children who lack quality open space and recreational facilities immediately near their homes. Summer basketball leagues, after-school programs, and many other activities offer constructive alternatives to gangs, drugs, and crime.

The Association also advises that one of the keys to addressing many chronic health conditions, including obesity, diabetes, and heart disease, and to preventive health in general, is providing citizens of all ages with easy access to places for physical activity. In urban communities like Baltimore, public parks and recreation centers are among the most accessible, affordable, and safest places where families, children, and seniors can be physically active.

Recreation centers and pools also meet another essential need within our communities by giving youth the opportunity to engage in sports and other aerobic activities. This is vitally important because of the prevalence of

obesity across our city. The Baltimore City Health Status Report 2008 indicates that, according to the 2007 Youth Risk Behavioral Surveillance System (a school-based survey), Baltimore high school students were 40% more likely to be obese than high school students statewide. The difference was largely due to female students; females in Baltimore were more than twice as likely to be obese.

Given the health challenges of our young people and the dangers the streets pose to our at-risk youth, it is imperative that all of our recreation centers, child care centers, and pools remain open and that the police continue to provide guidance and form alliances that discourage anti-social behavior. The PAL centers, many located in youth and crime dense neighborhoods, provide critical linkages between youth attendees and the police officers that serve their communities. Stationing "Officer Friendlys" within PAL centers has proved to be a mutually beneficial relationship for the officers and the youth, shattering both the perceived and physical walls between these two groups.

The powerful effects of the informal social and public safety networks cultivated within the PAL centers should be formally protected by the Baltimore Police Department, even with the discontinuation of the program. The development of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Baltimore Police Department and the Department of Recreation and Parks would serve to safeguard this relationship by ensuring that officers continue to be a visible presence in our community centers.

The influence of crime and drugs in our city cannot be mitigated without the targeted, supervised activities offered in the City's recreation centers. Without these centers, the systemic development of a generation of Baltimore's youth will be at risk. With the prevalence of violence in our City, our recreation and child care centers must also strive to maintain high standards and continue to recruit community youth. City residents should be able to leave for work knowing that their children will be cared for in a City recreation or child care center.

It is important that structurally sound recreation centers, child care centers, and pools slated to close in the upcoming months be encouraged to grow and allowed to continue to provide these vital services for our City's kids. The sociocultural opportunities afforded to Baltimore's youth through these centers must be a top fiscal priority for the current Administration. Therefore, we respectfully request that the Mayor find the funds to keep these resources open for the well being of Baltimore's youngest residents.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE, That the Mayor is hereby requested to restore funding for recreation centers, child care centers, and City pools in the Fiscal Year 2010 budget, and the Police Commissioner is hereby urged to work with the Director of Recreation and Parks to maintain a police presence in former Police Athletic League Centers.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Mayor, the Police Commissioner, the Director of Recreation and Parks, the Director of Finance, and the Mayor's Legislative Liaison to the City Council.

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