

Debra Thompson

From: Kellii Wood <kellii2005@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, August 08, 2019 12:19 PM
To: Assembly; Debra Thompson
Subject: Letter for Assembly Meeting regarding Parks and Recreation

8/8/2019

Unfortunately, I will be on a rockfish survey and will not be able to attend your next meeting. I was hoping the following letter could be read during your next assembly meeting regarding Petersburg Parks and Recreation.

Assembly Members,

As you may know from my previous letter, we oppose the age limit of 10 and under needing a chaperone to be in the facility during "open swim" and "open gym" that the Petersburg Parks and Recreation is proposing for the following reasons:

1. Petersburg is a place where we can let our children ride their bikes and play in playgrounds by themselves without too much worry. This also includes having the freedom to attend "open swim" and the public library by themselves. This ensures that children grow up to learn independence at an early age, encourages self-confidence, and reduces the risk of childhood obesity, which currently affect 1 in 5 children in the United States, resulting in early death. Closing the doors on this age group is one more door closing on childhood opportunities in our community.
2. Our property tax just increased to pay off our debt reimbursement fund, which we will be paying for another seven years. I fully support paying more taxes, but unfortunately, now we will be paying for a facility that we will/can no longer utilize. This is very frustrating to many people in the community with young families.
3. There are children in our community that need places like Parks and Recreation and the public library, that deal with horrible situations at home. They use this facility **every** time it is "open swim" because they need a break from their reality and find their dinner from the facility's vending machine. Many times, these children are safer in these public facilities than they are at home. Again, this age limit is going to close the doors on our most vulnerable.
4. This age limit is going to restrict a large number of children that will attend the facility, resulting in an even more reduced revenue for the facility, and potentially a complete closure of "open swim". A majority of attendees of "open swim" are 10 years and younger and typically attend without a parent present.

We understand that safety is a concern of theirs and they are looking to reduce liability in the event that a child in this age group is potentially abused by someone in the locker and bathrooms without a parent being with them.

We have shared with you the peer reviewed statistics on child abuse and would like to remind you that:

- 90% of all child abuse victims are abused by someone they know and trust.
- 71% of child abuse occurs in residential homes.
- A large majority of these victims are 19 years and younger, not just under the age of 11.
- A majority of assault and abuse happens to adult women outside of residential homes and in public places.

If safety and security is a true concern, many of us feel as though other simple measures, that don't exclude children and help protect everyone, should suffice the concerns of your lawyer. These were brought up during our community meeting on August 2nd:

- Have staff obtain training for prevention and intervention for many of these factors mentioned above. Free training is offered to businesses in Petersburg by the SHARE coalition.
- Since there has been a concern with lack of adult presence in the hallways of Parks and Rec, a suggestion of moving the Director's and Manager's office to the one near the gym was brought up and strongly encouraged by community members. This would help to protect all user groups, create public accessibility to the people in these positions, and would minimize kids getting into trouble in these areas that staff do not typically see.
- With the Director on site and visible, the 20-minute hallway checks that staff are supposed to be doing can be accounted for. During these checks, depending on gender, locker rooms and bathrooms can be checked.
- With potential grants, additional security cameras can be installed throughout the facility and access gates to locker rooms can be implemented to disallow people from entering the locker rooms without notifying a staff member.

It was asked during our meeting without an answer, but it would be important to look at the potential loss in revenue if this age limit is put into policy. We want this facility to be open to everyone that needs it and we believe a minimum age of seven years old should be applied, as this is more in line with other public community centers in Southeast Alaska (Wrangell is seven, Ketchikan does not have an age limit on their strong principle that their facility is open to everyone, and Juneau is eight).

We would like to end this letter with a quote from sportsadvisory.com:

“A vibrant community recreation center can have a stabilizing effect on the lives of young people. By providing safe and adequately equipped spaces for physical activities like dance, swim, yoga, basketball, and other sports, community centers instill discipline, healthy exercise habits, and teamwork. Community centers create the perfect setting for local mentorship programs, providing guidance and leadership development for the youth of the community. The role of community recreation centers is especially crucial for communities that lack the necessary facilities to keep their children in safe environments. After school programs provide a refuge for at-risk youth, helping to reduce crime rates, court costs, and other costs to the community. Ensuring community youth have a healthy outlet for their creativity and energy is an important step towards long-term community improvement. Discipline, self-esteem, and leadership are all qualities that are fostered in youth-focused programs.”

Thank you for this opportunity, and for your time.

Sincerely,

Kellii and Karsten Wood