

## **Debra Thompson**

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**From:** Heidi Cabral <hcabral@pcsd.us>  
**Sent:** Saturday, August 03, 2019 3:15 PM  
**To:** Assembly  
**Subject:** Parks and Rec

Borough Assembly,

I am borrowing a lot of my verbiage from others as I am not as eloquent as some and lack the time to do as much research so I thank you for listening to all as my thoughts reflect many community members.

This is in regards to the Petersburg Parks and Recreations process of changing their age limit policies. At our meeting with Steve, Chandra and Stephanie we had around 20 community members attend the meeting. This included three people from the schools, one from VSC, KFSK, and our police chief (that he was attending on behalf of being a father). Community members included myself, a past Parks and Recreation employee for 5 years, parents and people without kids that have grown up with this facility since its inception and Assemblyman Wohlhueter. We met yesterday to discuss these changes and how it will affect our usage. The new policy change is that they will restrict access to children 10 years and younger from being in the facility without an adult. This new policy directly affects my family and friends of my children.

My children regularly attend this facility without a parent throughout the year. Many times for open swim, open gym but especially for birthday parties (which we unfortunately did not get to in the meeting but I emailed them after to find out how a birthday would work as I do not care to stay for a 2 hour birthday party in most cases). Due to this change, we as a family will no longer be purchasing an annual pass if this policy is put in place. Some of the reasons why I (along with many other community parents, who do not have time to email but I will provide names if needed) are upset and feel this policy is unnecessary as follows:

1. 75% of the reason my family and I live here is due to the safety of my children and the independence it provides to them. 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 and encourages self-confidence. 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 understand that Parks and Recreation is one of the facilities that falls under this. I fully support paying more taxes to pay off our debt, 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. I personally know children in our community that need and use places like Parks and Recreation and the public library, to deal with unfortunate situations at home. I witnessed this many times while working there. They use this facility not just at open swim/gym times but at any time of day because they need a break from their reality. During our meeting, it was brought up that there are children in our community that get their meals from the vending machine at this facility. 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 even more reduced revenue for the facility, and potentially a complete closure of "open swim". I know for a fact that there are very few, if any, middle school or high school students that actually attend open swim or any other swim for that matter, therefore the majority of your swim patrons are children 10 and younger and adults. A majority of these children typically attend without a parent present. This will lead to a slow decline and functionality of this facility.

During the meeting(which Chandra did very little communicating) Steve told us, that the age was arbitrary but we need to protect our young children. Other community members shared with him and Chandra various researched publications that say otherwise. He told us that it will ultimately fall on the decision of the Assembly and that the lawyer will be contacting you with her "recommendations". I, along with a great number of parents, want to keep our children safe, but this decision is the opposite of "safe".

This portion comes from the other email that I am leaving in but want to point out that the parks and rec is under the school districts insurance so I feel like this information may be misunderstood: "He has also told me that due to increased insurance rates and discussions with the city lawyer, they felt that this age limits risk to the borough and helps to keep our children safe. When I asked what the correlation was between age limits and insurance rates, he responded with:

"On your insurance questions, there is no specific language. Insurance does not work this way. Carriers assess risk based upon past events, future expectations and some past precedence. It is the courts and juries who often become the arbitrator of "did an organization do enough to prevent a problem". Unfortunately they also do not give us a road map. They do give "credit" for all effective efforts taken to avoid obvious issues, and they recognize that there are no guarantees. We feel that with the changes we are recommending, our facility will be taking a common sense approach, along with reasonable actions to reduce the risks." "

Parental waivers (Alaska Statute: Sec. 09.65.292) were discussed but according to Chandra and Steve the lawyer has yet to respond up until yesterday's meeting. He claimed that they are waiting to hear back from the lawyer on this, but thinks she will think the City could still get sued. A community member asked how this waiver would differ from the ones we already sign for classes at Parks and Recreation and he told us he didn't have an answer. Maybe this could be added into the already existing disclaimer that all patrons are supposed to agree/sign?

There were some statistics shared from a previous email that I will not repeat but feel they should be looked at before this decision is made.

These statistics show that closing access to this age group without parents is actually a higher risk to the child, than having them in a safe and warm public facility.

Some alternatives that were shared at this meeting to keep ALL of our children and adults safe (not just those 10 and under) are followed. We were repeatedly told that budget is a concern but many of these suggestions would cost none to little, they would just involve more efficient staff, starting from the Director down. And even though the budget was a concern P&R has had their salaries increased \$52,702 since the last fiscal year. We have learned from the meeting this was to hire more life guards and an admin asst (even though they are currently having trouble with keeping the facility fully staffed). The budget for parks and rec has always and will always be higher than its revenue. Due to the fact that this is not new, just because of current state budget cuts, means that we should not except less from the parks and rec. We all know that the small bit of revenue generated from the parks and rec will continue to decline with these new policies. This issue seems to be arising from contacting the lawyer who does not live here to scare us into thinking that there are bad people lurking throughout our facility.

My last concern, if this is implemented, how are the staff able to monitor if parents are in the facility if they already have trouble monitoring the patrons coming and going from the facility?

If safety is truly a concern for our facility, then maybe the budget for Parks and Recreation has been misguided. There was recommendations for the Director to make sure the staff was being properly trained and some of these simple changes may satisfy the lawyers concerns:

- The Director of Parks and Recreations should contact the SHARE coalition (for community prevention activities). This group will train Parks and Recreation Staff on how to protect the children in our community.
- Post posters throughout the facility that alert everyone to remain vigilant and report any suspicious activity.
- Move the supervisors desk down to the office in the hallway next to the gym. VSC has stated they don't mind giving up the office is there is an adequate replacement (perhaps upstairs in one of the offices). There was a concern about lack of staff presence down the hallway. This would increase security, the presence of an adult, and make the supervisor more accessible. This bullet-point was extremely important to community members at the meeting, as most agreed that there isn't a strong enough adult presence in this location and tends to be an area where children tend to get into trouble. Especially with all the hallway doors being closed now due to money savings for the school.
- Have staff wear Parks and Recreation uniforms/t-shirts. Community members have stated that it is difficult to know who works at that facility and that having a uniform will help kids go to the appropriate people if they find themselves in trouble. From past experience, I know this is not only helpful to the patrons but also I loved it as an employee to have shirts to wear!
- Half hour hallway and locker room checks. This used to be implemented by not only myself but all staff. The Director told us that staff are currently required to do 20 minute hallway checks, but community members that attend this facility on a regular basis have agreed that they never see anyone walking the

hallways and said, as an adult, they would feel safer if they did. The Director seemed surprised by this, which is alarming and shows she isn't spending enough time at this facility or ensuring this is happening.

- Alarms on doors to alert staff someone is in the building when the facility is closed or that a door is open when it shouldn't be (I was told these alarms are fairly cheap to purchase and implement).
- Make entrance to locker rooms inaccessible unless an employee or user group adult is present.
- Bringing the security televisions to the front desk (they are currently in a closet) and increase number of cameras that look toward the locker rooms, the hall, and the front desk. We were told they are in the process of doing this but in the past, we used to be able to bring up cameras on the front desk computers so not sure if the change.
- Change main entry to facility.
- We recommended one way communication from locker rooms to front desk in the event there is an emergency, but would also satisfy privacy issues. Also one way radios from front desk to locker rooms to communicate with the public in the locker rooms (there actually is already a system in place but would need to be reinstalled).

Our City Manager has also shared with us the "Risk Assessment given by Alaska Public Entity Insurance", which was initially told, helped to determine an appropriate age limit for our own facility. This information was sent to you in a previous email that I will not repeat but agree with.

The details of these assessments are a misrepresentation of what other facilities are actually implementing throughout Alaska and how our new policy will be much more restrictive than other comparable Parks and Recreations such as Wrangell.

The following is a statement made by a previous email that I have the same opinion about:  
In summary, this is a public facility that should be available to anyone in our community. We pay for this place; it is not a private institution nor a "club". This policy may seem trivial to some, but in reality, it is critical to the quality of life in Petersburg. We cannot afford, monetarily or lifestyle, to close a public facility to this age group. I have shown that this arbitrary age limit is not a reflection of safety and that there are other more pertinent things Parks and Recreation should do to increase safety. I also fear that this is a slippery slope to disallowing children to attend by themselves in other public facilities. I am frustrated, and this is my last chance to express how important this is to myself and our community. I feel as though our concerns have been dismissed by the City Manager and the Parks and Recreation Director. Important questions have not been answered, and the excuses given have no factual basis. I hope that something can be done, because for every door that closes on our children, the more likely young families are going to leave this community. The community members that attended the meeting last night, agreed that 7 years old should be the minimum age for a child to attend the facility by themselves, as this is more in line with other public Parks and Recreation facilities in Southeast Alaska.

I thank each of you for your time. I would not reach out to you if this was not something I felt was important. As a former employee that worked under past and current management, I can honestly say

that this is something that needs to be dealt with internally before jumping the gun to change policies that affect our children and our community center.

Sincerely,

Heidi Cabral

Sent from my iPhone