



Testimony

Of

**Nancy Clark, MA, CIH, CSP**  
**Assistant Commissioner**  
**Bureau of Environmental Disease Prevention**

before the

**New York City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation**

regarding

**Intro. 123 Relating to Surface Areas of Playgrounds and Playing Fields**

April 15, 2010

250 Broadway  
New York, NY

Good morning Chairperson Mark-Viverito and members of the Parks Committee. My name is Nancy Clark and I am the Assistant Commissioner for Environmental Disease Prevention for the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (the Health Department). On behalf of Commissioner Farley, thank you for the opportunity to discuss Intro 123 and the importance of evaluating new surface materials for playgrounds and playing fields. We support the spirit of Intro 123 and the formation of an advisory committee to assist the City in its ongoing identification and evaluation of new surfacing products used in playgrounds and playing fields. However, we share some of the same concerns described by Deputy Commissioner Braddick and cannot support the bill as proposed.

For the past few years, the Health Department has been actively engaged in assessing potential health and safety concerns related to synthetic playing surfaces and providing ongoing technical assistance to the Parks Department. We have issued two reports on synthetic turf and environmental health issues; the first detailed a comprehensive review of the scientific literature on rubber infill synthetic turf and the second described air quality at synthetic turf playing fields. These reports, while identifying the presence of contaminants, found that the degree of exposure through ingestion, skin contact or inhalation is likely to be too small to increase the risk for any health effect. Subsequent studies by other researchers have found similar results. However, we did identify the potential for heat stress exposure at synthetic playing fields and recommended that heat mitigating strategies be implemented to prevent heat-related illness.

We have developed a strong partnership with the Department of Parks and Recreation's planners and continually provide input on surfacing materials, laboratory test methods to assess potential contaminants, recent scientific research, and recommendations for safe use of playing surfaces. We remain committed to this partnership and to promoting safe and healthy opportunities for children and adults to participate in physical activities in parks and playgrounds.

We agree that an advisory committee can be an important asset for the City's assessment and use of new playing surfaces; however, it is important that members of such a committee be designated for their expertise in relevant scientific and professional fields. Without appropriate expertise and experience, the advisory committee's ability to offer factual and useful input would be greatly limited. We recommend that membership on the committee include environmental health scientists, safety and medical professionals, landscape architects and park planners, athletic directors and physical exercise professionals, as well as representatives from user groups. In addition to providing recommendations on new playing surfaces, an advisory committee could also provide a forum for information exchange about playing surfaces and feedback from parent groups and users of playgrounds and playing fields. Recommendations and input from the advisory committee can promote selection of the best technologies, address areas of concern, develop public information on safe and healthy use, and give community members who use City playgrounds or playing fields a chance to voice their opinions. The role of the advisory committee should be formulated to provide relevant expertise and stakeholder input without duplicating effort or introducing unnecessary barriers to selecting and installing playing surfaces.

Opportunities for active recreation and physical activity have never been more important in our city. Over the past 20 years, obesity levels have doubled in the United States, and in New

York City, obesity is epidemic. More than half of adults and nearly half of young children in New York City are either overweight or obese. Unhealthy weight gain, even during childhood, is related to diabetes, heart disease, asthma, and depression. Supporting better nutrition and extending opportunities for physical exercise are the best ways to promote healthy weight and prevent chronic health problems related to obesity. We live in a densely populated city with limited open space, and sports fields are in short supply. It is critical that we promote, not impede, the use of innovative products that can provide greater access to safe and healthy recreation in our parks.

I thank you for the opportunity to discuss this important issue. We look forward to continuing our work with the Council towards the goal of making New York City a better, safer and healthier city.

###