



PUBLIC CITIZENS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Testimony of Shelly Yanoff, Executive Director

To Philadelphia City Council

Committee on Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs

Resolution # 120045

March 5, 2012

Good morning, I am Shelly Yanoff, executive director of PCCY, the region's major child advocacy group. I want to thank you for holding this hearing and for drawing attention to the need for the city's children and youth to have safe havens, places to go to in the nonschool hours for recreation, creativity, learning and protection.

In the mid-nineties, PCCY with the support of many of you identified the problem of so many kids being home alone after school. Together with private philanthropy, the city and state and federal governments increased efforts to develop programming and programs in out of school time. As you well know, our city has suffered much in the last decades and in spite of some remarkable work by a host of entities, private and public, in spite of the work of several foundations, the school district and many individuals and corporations, we still had far to go to respond to the need for all children and youth to have somewhere to go and something to do with someone who cares when school was out.

There are many children and youth who are at risk because they are home alone, unsupervised, with nothing to do in the non-school hours. And there is a network of programs supported by federal, state and local governments that provide regular afterschool programming for approximately 24,000-26,000 youth. These programs have provided regular activities in the non-school hours four-five days per week. . Additionally as you know, the PAL centers serve about 23,000 children, the libraries' LEAP program serves about 80,000 children a year and ASAP and a host of wonderful programs serve thousands more. And yet- we were still not meeting the need last year.

As you know afterschool hours are the most dangerous time for children- it is the time for getting in trouble. According to national estimates, between 26 and 33% of children in kindergarten through 12th grade were benefitting in afterschool programs last year in PA; that would mean between 65,000 and 81,000 were not.

Tens of thousands of Philadelphia kids were in effect home alone after school.

Local surveys estimate that about 112,000 children and youth between 6 and 17 years old were in regular programmed activities. These numbers show that we recognize the vulnerability of youth and society of not providing, regular, opportunities to children in the nonschool hours.

In the last years, while the city has recognized the need-in some areas- it has been at the expense of others. We have a strong array of recreation centers in our communities- but we have not been able to keep up with the need. Today, far too many of our recreation centers are so minimally staffed that they cannot live up to their basic purpose. Indeed these centers

have lost 30% of their funding in the last several years. If we want strong community centers, if we want strong communities, we must be better able to staff and support them so that they can fulfill their basic and expanded mission. Like our libraries, these recreation centers can be ports in the storm of adolescence. I know that you believe that these centers are important but they cannot do their job and pick up the slack for the latest crisis without adequate staffing. The centers can play such an important part of a young persons' life.

But they cannot do it with one staff person in a center- without a computer, without support. Yet that is the condition we start with- before we look at current need, before the latest funding crisis of the school district. Each of you knows how important – what a strong contribution regular planned activities make in keeping families strong and neighborhoods safe and together. As we look at summer programming, we worry about 13,000 kids who received their lunch through the school district's summer program now being hungry; we worry about the large number of kids who will be more at risk because summer schools will not be open.

City and the Department of Recreation leadership have courted business leaders in the past to open the pools, to support ice skating, reclaiming parks etc- and they in turn have courted you to support their needs . We ask you now to support the business community this time by having them step up to the plate and use their collective weight to urge state leadership to reject a budget that penalizes this city's young people. We urge you, each and all, to ask the business community to pass a budget that will not reduce life chances for this region's children.

That will mean having Southeastern Pennsylvania's Chamber of Commerce put its weight behind increasing support for our schools, our communities as well as quality early childhood programs in the city, region and state.

We will have no future if we don't invest in being accountable; we will have no future if we continue to support jails over education. WE urge all to request the Chamber support business by supporting children. You will soon receive the city budget and we will be back at that time asking that you invest in the future as well as the present.

This year's budget will not be easy - but neither are the lives of more than 390,000 children who depend on you.

Thank you.