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COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

3

COMMITTEE ON THE DISABLED AND

4

THE HANDICAPPED

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Room 400, City Hall
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Tuesday, December 4, 2007
12:45 p.m.

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PRESENT:

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COUNCILWOMAN DONNA REED MILLER

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COUNCILMAN JACK KELLY

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COUNCILMAN JUAN RAMOS

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COUNCILWOMAN MARIAN B. TASCO

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BILL 071002 - An ordinance amending Title 15
of The Philadelphia Code, entitled "Parks and
Recreation," by requiring the Department of
Recreation to provide ten percent of all
program activities and budgetary expenditures
at one Class A Recreation Center to children
with autistic disorders, under certain terms
and conditions.

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V A R A L L O Incorporated

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Litigation Support Services

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Eleven Penn Center

1835 Market Street, Suite 600
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19103

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COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: The

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Committee on the Disabled and the

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Handicapped is now in session, the public

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hearing, on Bill No. 071002.

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Will the Clerk please read the

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title of the bill.

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THE CLERK: Bill No. 071002, an

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ordinance amending Title 10 of The

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Philadelphia Code, entitled "Parks and

11

Recreation," by requiring the Department

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of Recreation to provide ten percent of

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all program activities and budgetary

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expenditures at one Class A Recreation

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Center to children with autistic

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disorders, under certain terms and

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conditions.

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COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Thank

19

you.

20

For the record, in attendance,

21

members of this Committee, to my left,

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Councilman Kelly, Councilwoman Tasco. To

23

my right, Councilman Juan Ramos and

24

myself, Councilwoman Miller.

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Councilwoman Campbell, who is Chair of

1 12/4/07 - DISABLED - BILL 071002
2 this Committee, is not able to be here
3 today, but we're going to move on without
4 her.

5 I see the witnesses are at the
6 witness table. I knew we'd have two. We
7 have three. Please identify yourself and
8 proceed with your testimony.

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CARAPUCCI:
10 My name is William Carapucci, Deputy
11 Commissioner of the Recreation
12 Department. I'm here representing the
13 Commissioner, Victor Richard. To my left
14 is Carl George. He's the Therapeutic
15 Recreation Specialist in our Department
16 and the Supervisor of the Carousel House.
17 To my right is Leo Dignam, Program
18 Director in charge of all our day camps
19 and children activities.

20 I could read the testimony now
21 that was prepared.

22 Good afternoon, Councilwoman
23 Campbell and honorable members of City
24 Council. I am William Carapucci, Deputy
25 Recreation Commissioner. I am here to

1 12/4/07 - DISABLED - BILL 071002
2 give public testimony regarding Bill
3 B 070951 (sic).

4 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Just 07.
5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CARAPUCCI:
6 It's B 071002. Accompanying me are Leo
7 Dignam and Carl George.

8 The mission of the Department
9 of Recreation is to provide an array of
10 physical, cultural and artistic
11 activities that reach the mind, body and
12 soul. The Department of Recreation
13 believes in engaging children, adults,
14 families and senior citizens in fun and
15 safe recreation activities that promote
16 self-esteem, healthy life-styles and
17 stronger communities.

18 The City of Philadelphia's
19 Department of Recreation is extremely
20 proud of the Carousel House. The
21 Carousel House is a 24,000 square foot
22 Class A recreation center solely
23 dedicated to the services for the
24 mentally and physically challenged. The
25 Carousel House provides a multitude of

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2 activities, including arts and crafts,
3 music, swimming, organized games, trips
4 and special events. The facility houses
5 a multi-purpose meeting room with a
6 performance stage, kitchen, full
7 gymnasium, an indoor therapeutic pool,
8 fitness/rehabilitation room, specially
9 designed computer lab and a specially
10 designed playground. The Carousel House
11 also has ADA-accessible lift buses to
12 provide daily transportation services to
13 and from the facility.

14 We believe the Carousel House
15 meets the intention of the bill because
16 the entire facility is dedicated to the
17 mentally and physically challenged.

18 We thank you for the
19 opportunity to testify. We'd be happy to
20 answer any questions.

21 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Thank
22 you. Thank you for your testimony.

23 Are there any Committee members
24 that have questions of this witness?

25 Councilwoman Tasco.

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2 COUNCILWOMAN TASC0: Good

3 afternoon. Mr. Carapucci, I think we had
4 this testimony last week sometime where
5 we were talking about trying to provide
6 services for disabled citizens in the
7 community, and this bill sort of follows
8 that trend. We have a deep appreciation
9 for the Carousel House and don't believe
10 you should get rid of it, but at the end
11 of the day, it would be better for
12 citizens to be able to access and have
13 programs in their neighborhood without
14 having to travel to a central location.
15 Is that something that you all agree to?

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CARAPUCCI:

17 Yes, we would agree to it, provided we
18 had the additional funding and we had the
19 additional staff that's specifically
20 trained in that area of therapeutic
21 recreation.

22 COUNCILWOMAN TASC0: So if this
23 legislation is passed, what would be the
24 Recreation Department's response to
25 implementing the ordinance down the line?

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2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CARAPUCCI:

3 Well, if I recall, when the Commissioner
4 was here last week, he proposed having
5 one facility in each district, so we'd
6 have ten of these facilities, and that
7 would be our goal. If we could have
8 enough funding, enough staffing to put
9 this program forward, we'd have to be up
10 to ten facilities so that every area of
11 the City is reached.

12 COUNCILWOMAN TASCIO: Thank you
13 very much.

14 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: These
15 would be separate facilities and not just
16 a part of an existing?

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CARAPUCCI:

18 No. You could have a present facility.
19 You'd have to find one in each
20 councilmanic district that would fit the
21 needs, and then with the additional
22 funding, we could equip it and we need
23 the staffing to do the specialized
24 program.

25 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Has

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2 anybody come up with a projected cost,
3 just an estimated cost?

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CARAPUCCI:

5 I think about \$3 million, off the top of
6 my head. I mean, we haven't come up with
7 any clear-cut dollar figures, but if
8 you're going to have, let's say, ten
9 therapeutic recreation specialists, their
10 salary is, you know, at least \$50,000 per
11 person, and then you're going to have the
12 proper equipment in each center.

13 If you take a look at Carousel
14 House, we have eight full-time people
15 because of the special needs. We don't
16 have that at any rec center in the City.
17 Our Class A rec centers presently have
18 two full-time rec leaders and a part-time
19 rec leader and a maintenance man. That's
20 it. So the professional full-time staff,
21 it would at least double if we were going
22 to do this on a citywide basis.

23 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Okay.

24 Thank you.

25 Are there any other questions?

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2 Councilman Kelly.

3 COUNCILMAN KELLY: Thank you,
4 Madam Chair.

5 Mr. Carapucci, how long would
6 it take you to implement this program
7 after the bill is approved?

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CARAPUCCI:
9 With the funding, if we could hire the
10 people, I would say we could probably do
11 this -- it would take us about six
12 months, because we'd have to identify the
13 centers, which I think that's not that
14 hard to do. Then we'd have to make
15 sure --

16 COUNCILMAN KELLY: They would
17 all be Class A centers, right?

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CARAPUCCI:
19 Absolutely. We'd have to make sure we
20 have the proper equipment and we'd have
21 to fit it in to each particular
22 community.

23 So I would say at the earliest,
24 sometime next September. You couldn't do
25 it right now. So you'd need seven, eight

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2 months of preparation, because -- nothing
3 can be done overnight with this. This is
4 a process. I remember when Carousel
5 House was being built. That took us a
6 long time to put that together. Now,
7 today after it's been up 20 years -- in
8 fact, I think this is the 20th year.
9 It's now fully functional and operating,
10 but -- so it won't be done overnight. At
11 the earliest, six to nine months,
12 possibly more than a year.

13 COUNCILMAN KELLY: And that
14 would include the ten recreation centers?

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CARAPUCCI:
16 We would have to have that, because we
17 need the staffing, and it might involve a
18 little more. We need the people that are
19 experts in that area. We have to do this
20 the right way, because this is a
21 situation where it's not just a regular
22 recreation program. If you want a
23 program that's what we've done for years,
24 we could put that together for you in a
25 month, but in this case, we want to take

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2 our time and make sure we don't make any
3 mistakes. But we can make the thing work
4 with additional funding.

5 COUNCILMAN KELLY: Thank you.
6 Thank you, Madam Chair.

7 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Thank
8 you.

9 I just want to remind you,
10 Mr. Carapucci, that the ordinance
11 actually only requires one Class A
12 facility in the entire City. I mean, it
13 would be nice to do ten.

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CARAPUCCI:
15 With the additional funding and with the
16 proper staffing, we could do a lot.

17 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Great.
18 Thank you.

19 Does any Committee members have
20 questions of this witness?

21 (No response.)

22 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Seeing
23 none, thank you. Thank you for your
24 testimony.

25 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CARAPUCCI:

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2 Thank you.

3 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: I think
4 we have Cecilia Thompson.

5 Hi. You're here to testify on
6 the bill?

7 MS. THOMPSON: Yes.

8 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Can you
9 come up to the table, identify yourself
10 for the record and proceed with your
11 testimony.

12 MS. THOMPSON: My name is
13 Cecilia Thompson. I'm an advocate with
14 the Arc of Philadelphia. It's an
15 organization that's been around for 60
16 years, and we provide supports and
17 services for people with disabilities.
18 I'm also a member of the Philadelphia
19 Rights of Education Task Force, which is
20 a federally mandated organization that
21 provides systemic advocacy for those
22 receiving special education of
23 Philadelphia. Primarily I'm a parent of
24 a nine-year-old son with autism, who is
25 in full-time autistic support at Thomas

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2 Morton Elementary School located on 63rd
3 and Elmwood.

4 Before I get started, I just
5 wanted to say a few things of what they
6 said about the Carousel House.

7 My son did actually attend
8 summer camp at the Carousel House this
9 past summer, and before he was able to
10 participate, he had to be interviewed by
11 that person to make sure -- and the term
12 that I was given, to make sure he was
13 teachable for their programs. In
14 addition, before he could even
15 participate, I was told that he had to
16 have a TSS worker, which is the
17 therapeutic support person, for him to
18 participate in that program. And they
19 explain that on their forms, that if you
20 have to have -- if they decide that you
21 need a therapeutic support person, you
22 have to pay extra monies for that
23 therapeutic support person.

24 In addition, although the main
25 staff people may have had knowledge of

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2 autism, the college students that they
3 hired to support them during that time
4 had no clue about the core deficits of
5 autism. There was one incident where he
6 was in the pool where they engaged him in
7 play and when they stopped, because
8 cognitively he was not able to stop or
9 didn't understand that play time was
10 over, the young lady wrote him up. When
11 the TSS worker told me this, I
12 immediately called the gentleman who was
13 head of the summer camp, and he said no
14 problem, the staffer knew, they don't
15 understand autism, he will not be written
16 up. Because if you have incidents in the
17 summer camp, you are not invited back to
18 the Carousel House.

19 And another incident was, they
20 were having Olympics and they told him to
21 run, so he ran, but he did not know that
22 the word "finish" meant that he was to
23 stop running. Again, because they did
24 not take the time to pattern the game for
25 him and let him know that you start here,

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2 you run here and you stop, that he wasn't
3 able to follow it. They just assumed.

4 And, again, this is not to the
5 main staff that he's talking about, but
6 if you're going to have people that are
7 going to be around children with autism,
8 your staff needs to be first trained on
9 the core deficits. They need to know
10 that some children, you have to pattern
11 the game for them and then have them do
12 it a couple times before they can
13 actually engage in the activity.

14 So I wanted to make that point,
15 because I know people are under the
16 assumption that the Carousel House is the
17 catch-all guru for all disabilities.
18 And, again, their permanent staff might
19 be fine, but those college kids and those
20 support staff that they have there for
21 the summertime for the summer camps, from
22 my past experience as of last -- this
23 past summer, they were not trained. And
24 I just pointed out those two incidents.
25 There were a few more, but, again, the

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2 support staff was not trained on the core
3 deficits of what autism is.

4 So with that in mind, the
5 request is that the ideal person should
6 be a recreational therapist trained to
7 provide programming for individuals on
8 the autism spectrum. In lieu of a
9 recreation therapist, there should be a
10 person who has experience in providing
11 age-appropriate programming for children
12 and adults with autism. And I say adults
13 because there are some people who may be
14 19 or 20 who still have the mentality --
15 because autism often times comes with
16 mental retardation, they still have the
17 mind set of maybe a four- or
18 five-year-old, but I believe that if
19 their parents or caregivers are
20 tax-paying citizens, they have the right
21 to an opportunity to participate in
22 programming.

23 The staff should receive
24 training regarding individuals on the
25 spectrum. The training would include,

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2 but not be limited to, being aware of the
3 basic characteristics and core deficits
4 of individuals on the autism spectrum,
5 being aware of the needs of the
6 individuals on the spectrum, and should
7 this be permanent, they should be
8 required to have yearly trainings and
9 updates on interventions pertaining to
10 the autism community.

11 The staff should also
12 understand the social complexities of
13 individuals with autism to facilitate an
14 inclusive experience. This means to,
15 one, include children with autism in
16 activities offered by that particular
17 facility; and, two, development
18 programming to include typical
19 individuals and individuals with autism.
20 Both will serve as a learning mechanism
21 for typical individuals to understand
22 individuals with autism and for
23 individuals with autism to develop
24 typical friendships with their peers.

25 My first point is being done

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2 successfully at the Palumbo recreation
3 facility. There is a young man ten years
4 old participating in the NFL Flag
5 Football Program. The staff works with
6 the individual and his challenges to
7 include him in the football game.

8 In addition to the staff being
9 appropriately trained, the staff needs to
10 possess a passion to providing
11 programming for this population. It
12 takes a lot of patience and love to work
13 with individuals with autism. When you
14 work with one person with autism, you
15 work with one person with autism.

16 The program should be
17 adequately staffed depending on the
18 functionality of the individuals. For
19 example, if there are ten individuals
20 with elopement issues, you would need at
21 least five staff persons. However, if
22 the group is high-functioning individuals
23 in need of just social interaction, you
24 may only need two staff persons.

25 The Department of Recreation

1 12/4/07 - DISABLED - BILL 071002
2 should be given adequate funding to
3 properly staff programs for individuals
4 with autism.

5 The program should take into
6 consideration the unique sensory needs of
7 children on the spectrum. This may
8 include adjusting the lighting or
9 providing a calm setting so the
10 individuals can participate in the
11 activities.

12 There should also be a room --
13 there should also be set aside a "calm"
14 room for individuals with autism. Often
15 individuals with autism have moments of
16 frustration, trouble communicating their
17 thoughts or they have sensory overload
18 where their brain cannot process
19 everything in their immediate
20 environment. This results in disruptive
21 behaviors. A "calm" room would provide a
22 place for individuals with autism to calm
23 down so the staff can address the reason
24 for the behavior.

25 The programming should be age

1 12/4/07 - DISABLED - BILL 071002

2 appropriate for individuals with autism.

3 You shouldn't have a 16-year-old -- the

4 program for a 16-year-old should not be

5 the same programming as for a

6 five-year-old individual.

7 The recreation centers that are

8 selected to provide programming for

9 children with autism should have visual

10 symbols wherever signs are located and

11 label objects to capitalize on the visual

12 strengths of most individuals with

13 autism.

14 In conclusion, these programs

15 should be placed in areas which have a

16 high concentration of individuals with

17 autism. There are 52 Class A recreation

18 facilities in Philadelphia. If it is not

19 immediately feasible to provide programs

20 in all 52 sites, at least put the

21 programs in those areas which have a high

22 concentration of individuals with autism.

23 These figures can be gathered from the

24 School District of Philadelphia,

25 Community Behavioral Health, and Office

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2 of Mental Retardation.

3 Most important, as a parent of
4 a child with autism, I often go outside
5 the City of Philadelphia to find
6 activities for my son which are
7 specifically designed for children with
8 autism. These facilities have the staff
9 that have the expertise, training and
10 patience to deal with my son and guide
11 him through activities. However, these
12 activities do come with a cost.
13 Nevertheless, I pay the fees and drive an
14 hour from my home because I love my son
15 and want him exposed to a number of
16 experiences. However, as a tax-paying
17 citizen of Philadelphia, I should not
18 have to drive an hour from my home to
19 expose him to activities offered by the
20 Department of Recreation. Yet, I do so
21 because I want him around staff who have
22 an understanding of autism, can
23 accommodate his needs and utilize his
24 strengths to get him to participate
25 successfully in activities.

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2 I ask both the members of City
3 Council and the Commissioner from the
4 Department of Recreation to hear the
5 concerns addressed today and provide
6 programming for individuals with autism.

7 Thank you.

8 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Thank
9 you. Thank you for your testimony.

10 Are there any questions of this
11 witness from members of the Committee?

12 (No response.)

13 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Seeing
14 none, thank you.

15 This Committee will move from
16 the public hearing to the public meeting.

17 Councilman Ramos.

18 COUNCILMAN RAMOS: Thank you,
19 Madam Chair. I move that Bill No. 071002
20 be reported out of this Committee with a
21 favorable recommendation and further move
22 that the rules of Council be suspended to
23 permit first reading of this bill at our
24 next Council meeting.

25 (Duly seconded.)

1 12/4/07 - DISABLED - BILL 071002

2 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: All in
3 favor?

4 (Aye.)

5 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Opposed?

6 (No response.)

7 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: The ayes
8 have it. Bill No. 071002 will be
9 reported out of this Committee with a
10 favorable recommendation and a request
11 for rules suspension so as to permit
12 first reading at our next Council
13 session.

14 That concludes the hearing of
15 the Committee on the Disabled and
16 Handicapped.

17 Thank you.

18 (Committee on the Disabled and
19 Handicapped adjourned at 1:05 p.m.)

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CERTIFICATE

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I HEREBY CERTIFY that the

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proceedings, evidence and objections are

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contained fully and accurately in the

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stenographic notes taken by me upon the

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foregoing matter on December 4, 2007, and that

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this is a true and correct transcript of same.

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MICHELE L. MURPHY

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RPR-Notary Public

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