



Hearing before the New York City Council Committee on Parks & Recreation  
Int 0856-2015- A Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York,  
in relation to parks department recreation center fees for veterans and persons with  
disabilities.

October 2, 2015

Testimony By: Adena Long, Assistant Commissioner for Public Programs, New York  
City Parks and Recreation

Good morning, Chairman Levine, Chairman Ulrich, and members of the Parks & Recreation Committee. I am Adena Long, the Assistant Commissioner for Public Programs for the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation. Joining me on this panel is Matt Drury, Director of Government Relations. Additionally, we have with us today Kleo King, Deputy Commissioner and General Counsel for the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities, and Catherine La Porte, Deputy Commissioner for the Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs. Thank you for inviting me to testify today regarding Intro 856, which amends Chapter One of Title 18 of the administrative code of the city of New York.

To begin, I would like to say a few words about my role at NYC Parks. As the Assistant Commissioner for Public Programs, I oversee our Recreation, Urban Park Ranger, and Aquatics divisions as well as citywide Computer Resource Centers. We offer recreational and educational programs for all New Yorkers. We encourage children to stay active through our Kids In Motion program, afterschool sports clinics and swim instruction among dozens of other programs. Our Urban Park Rangers offer outdoor environmental education to youth through our Natural Classroom program, Custom Adventures and the Rangers Conservation Corps. To encourage New York City adults and seniors to remain active, healthy, social and engaged in their community, we offer a variety of programs, including Shape Up NYC, Senior Splash and Adult Swim hours at our pools, and numerous options for those interested in sports, fitness, and outdoor adventure.

As you're aware, NYC Parks oversees more than 1,900 parks, 1,000 playgrounds, 14 miles of public beaches, 67 pools and 48 recreation and nature centers. Since 1910, NYC Parks has provided the most affordable and extensive network of recreational services throughout New York City. Our recreation centers offer facilities such as indoor pools, weight rooms, basketball courts, dance studios, game rooms, art studios, and libraries. Additionally, Shape Up NYC offers free fitness classes every week at dozens of recreation centers across the five boroughs. Class offerings include aerobics, yoga, pilates, and Zumba. All of our recreation centers offer a range of programs for people of all ages.

We work closely with other City agencies, including the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities and the Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs, to ensure that the voice of the disabled and military veterans' communities are represented when we design or redesign our facilities and that our programs and policies address the needs of people with disabilities and veterans across the city.

As discussed at a Parks Committee hearing earlier this year, the Public Programs division of NYC Parks offers a variety of adaptive sports and recreation activities for individuals of all ages and abilities, exposing participants to programs that will help

them grow socially, emotionally and physically. The ultimate goal of these programs is to show individuals living with a disability how participation in a sport and living a healthy, active lifestyle can have a profoundly positive impact on their lives.

Our adaptive programming features a rich and diverse set of activities, ranging from:

- Youth and Adult sports for persons with disabilities such as wheelchair basketball, football, softball, tennis and power soccer;
- Adaptive Aquatics, offering a complete body workout and ranging from gentle walking in water to high-energy exercise;
- The Paralympics Track and Field Open, a semi-annual event held at Icahn Stadium on Randall's Island, where children with physical disabilities come together to compete in a variety of events;
- Seated Fitness Classes, accessible for people in wheelchairs and those with limited mobility, including aerobics, dance, weight training and yoga;
- Visual arts programs, which provide artists with disabilities the opportunity to develop their skills and socialize with others in the program; and
- Sign Language classes, where registrants learn the basics of sign language—colors, numbers, basic greetings and general conversation starters;

NYC Parks is committed to providing accessible facilities at parks and recreation centers throughout the city and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities. We work to ensure our facilities can be enjoyed by all New Yorkers, and are fully compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Further, several of our Recreation Centers feature wheelchair-accessible fitness equipment that can be used by people with disabilities or limited mobility. Lastly, each borough features a Recreation Center that serves as an Adaptive Hub, a fully accessible recreation center that leads their borough in offering programs for New Yorkers with disabilities. These hubs are also a center of information where patrons can go to get more information on what NYC Parks offers citywide for members with disabilities.

As for the men and women who have served our country as members of the Armed Forces, many of whom face financial and social challenges upon returning home, NYC Parks plans to express our gratitude through a new, low priced recreation center membership. NYC Parks honors our veterans at more than 270 memorials located in our Parks throughout the city, and hosts military memorial, patriotic and celebratory events such as Memorial Day, Flag Day, Veterans Day and other special military tributes throughout our city, commemorating their dedication to our country. We are dedicated to ensuring that military veterans can enjoy affordable access to opportunities to stay healthy and active members of in our parks and recreation centers.

Specific to the subject of Intro 856, I'm proud to share that Parks has been actively exploring the creation of a new membership level for people with disabilities and military veterans at our recreation centers. Presently, NYC Parks offers affordable membership rates at recreation centers citywide, with annual memberships as low as \$100 for adults, \$25 for seniors and young adults, and free memberships for youth under the age of 18. In coordination with the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities and the Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs, along with various advocacy and stakeholder groups, we are currently preparing to pursue a rule change through the City Administrative Procedure Act (or CAPA) to institute a \$25 membership package for military veterans and people with disabilities. We hope that this will encourage even more New Yorkers to enjoy low-cost opportunities to stay healthy and active. We look forward to our continued partnership with the Council in this effort.

We commend Council Members Levine, Ulrich, and their colleagues for their leadership and interest in this issue as we continue an important conversation with this proposed legislation. We agree that the creation of a new fee category would be a great addition to our current member packages. Parks is committed to bringing to fruition, the Council's vision of making a difference in the lives of veterans and members with disabilities. We look forward to continued collaboration with the City Council and the Administration on this topic, and we will update you as we make progress in our effort to institute this rule change to ensure our parks and facilities can be enjoyed by as many New Yorkers as possible.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you this afternoon. My colleagues and I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

**NYC Veterans Alliance**  
**[www.nycveteransalliance.org](http://www.nycveteransalliance.org)**

Testimony by Samuel Innocent  
NYC Veterans Alliance

Hearing on Int. 856:  
Discounted Parks Recreation Center Fees for Veterans and Persons with Disabilities

NYC Council Committee on Parks and Recreation  
Honorable Mark Levine, Chair

October 2, 2015

Good afternoon Chairman Levine, Councilmember Mealy, Councilmember Cabrera, Councilmember Van Bremer, Councilmember Cohen, Councilmember Maisel and Councilmember Treyger.

My name is Samuel Innocent and I testify before you on behalf of the New York City Veterans Alliance, its membership, and the veteran community at large.

When speaking of New York City Parks, *veteran* is not a word that is often affiliated with that, because to most people it just doesn't seem to fit. Why would one think *veteran* when thinking about a park or a green space? It is my goal to provide insight as to what city parks means to veterans, and most certainly what they meant for me.

New York City is a daunting place and can be a bit much to consume for those who visit; for those who choose to make this great city home, the fast pace and the symphony of car honks, loud music and rumbling tracks is something that you grow accustomed to over time. That period of transition from newcomer to tried and true New Yorker is important. If it is good, you'll be a proud New Yorker, if it's bad, you'll despise living here and continue to look for the first opportunity to leave.

I was born in Brooklyn and raised in New York, where I've spent my whole life. I even spent my entire military career in the state of New York, minus the year I spent in Afghanistan. Yet despite all this, when I came home I was a stranger to this City and it felt unknown to me. Neighborhoods had changed as well of the faces in old hangouts. I was no longer a child enjoying the rush of all things but a man who had to make his own way. The lights, sounds, fast-paced pedestrians, and overcrowded metro were overwhelming and caused me to shy away from outings with friends.

The Parks were my only escape. First in Brooklyn where I lived it was Prospect Park. Though there were still many people who frequented there, I was always able to find my own space where I could read my college books or lay back and enjoy the surrounding activities. When I moved to the Bronx the first thing I did was look for a park that would serve as my escape just as Prospect Park did. This new place was Wave Hill and it was everything I needed and more. It has more green space than one could ask for and most important, it was quiet and had a moderate amount of visitors. I would have visited this park a few times a week but the fee of \$8 per adult limited my visits to a reasonable 2-3 times per month. The very day that the

IDNYC with the veterans identifier was released, I went and got one because it meant that for one year I could visit Wave Hill as often as I'd like rather than only as often as I could afford.

The Parks of New York City were as a big a part of my transition as the veteran groups, the VA hospital and the friends and family that I came home to. In times of stress they were my relief and I hope that they can be the same for the veterans who call New York home. I'm happy that our council members are recognizing the value that green spaces and parks have in the lives of our nation's heroes and I hope that parks as a place of tranquility for veterans will become a part of the larger conversation about veterans in transition.

**For these reasons, the NYC Veterans Alliance strongly supports making facilities at New York City parks as accessible and affordable as possible for veterans.** Parks are places of tranquility where a veteran like myself can regain peace of mind. They are also places for recreational activities that allow us to channel our minds and bodies in healthy outlets, whether that be swimming pools, gyms, athletic courts, game rooms, or other places that allow us to find the tranquility of focus and exertion. If we say we truly want veterans to come home and feel at home in New York City, we must make our parks as accessible as possible to them.

Thank you for allowing me to testify and thank you for your time.

**FOR THE RECORD**

**Ms. Debra Greif  
Chairperson & Statewide BFSSAC  
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October 2, 2015

Testimony of Debra Greif Chairperson of the BFSSAC

Good afternoon NYC City Council,

I want to thank you for holding this hearing on the NYC Parks Department Recreation Centers proposed fee reduction for persons with disabilities.

I represent families who have children with developmental disabilities who live at home with their families receiving Family Support Services from OPWDD. I am also a person with disabilities as well as a sibling and a parent who have disabilities. I also was the Co-Chair of the Brooklyn Borough Presidents Committee on Disability Issues for Marty Markowitz. We did an informational booklet that was on the Borough Presidents website called "What is Your Disability IQ?" We found that persons with disabilities were not able to access facilities to exercise because of the lack of accessible gyms. We knew that the NYC Parks Department had these Rec centers. The problem was not the accessibility part, but the fees for the rec centers was too expensive. At the current fee of \$150 with a pool or \$100 without the pool I know myself, my son and the families that I represent are in the same financial difficult I am in. Many of our families are run by single family households usually mothers who are not working due to their child's disability as well as they may have disabilities too. Our adult children are not working too. Many of our children collect SSI, some SSDI because they are Adult Child Survivors who collect this benefit because they have a parent who has either become disabled, retired or who has died. I collect SSI benefits for my disabilities so the \$150 fee is too expensive for me. We do have to pay rent, electric, phone and buy food. Our food stamp benefits keep going down. Even though we have disabilities the activities at these rec centers would be great for us to go to if we could afford them.

Please lower the NYC Parks Department Rec Center Fees for persons with disabilities to \$25. It would make a big difference in our lives.



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

**Hearing on Intro 856**

**October 2, 2015**

**Tupper Thomas, Executive Director**

Good afternoon, I am Tupper Thomas, Executive Director of New Yorkers for Parks.

We certainly support this legislation and believe that veterans and people with disabilities should have the same rates that youth and seniors receive at our recreation centers.

Most of the centers are located in neighborhoods which have no other ways to get the exercise we all need to keep healthy. It is understandable that NYC Parks would want everyone to pay a little something for the service they get but these fees cannot cover the real cost of the programs and activities offered.

There is a real need for staffing and providing well maintained and ongoing replacement of the equipment in these very heavily used recreation centers. There is never enough money for the equipment or for hiring specialists who could provide more support for the programs that are offered.

A healthy life style is so essential for all New Yorkers and these centers provide that. They should be available to all but there must also be more tax dollars going into these wonderful resources so that they can provide maximum activities for our youth, seniors, veterans and people with disabilities.

I hope that at budget time the Council and the Administration will increase the operating budgets for our Recreation Centers.

Thank you.



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Name: Patrick Bryant

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I represent: Vets For Vets

Address: 124 Street & 38th Ave NYC

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I represent: New Yorkers for Park

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Name: Samuel Innocent

Address: 2490 Davidson Ave, Apt B6, Bronx, NY, 10468

I represent: NYC Veteran Alliance

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Name: Edith P. ...

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Name: Adena Long

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I represent: NYC Parks

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Name: Math Drey

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I represent: NYC Parks

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