



March 29, 2024

Hon. Bernie Sanders  
United States Senate  
332 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510-4503

Hon. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez  
United States House of Representatives  
250 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515-3214

Dear Senator Sanders and Rep. Ocasio-Cortez,

KABOOM! is the national nonprofit dedicated to ending playspace inequity in communities across the country. Playspace inequity exists when the amount and quality of a child's available play infrastructure is lower than it ought to be due to racially biased patterns of investment stemming from legacy policies like redlining and racially based school segregation. While those policies are no longer allowed, their effects have persisted and still impact the lives of Black and brown children in communities across America. KABOOM! works to address this disparity by bringing public and private resources to these historically disinvested communities for the purpose of designing and building playgrounds which create a sense of belonging as well meet the physical activity needs of children.

Your "Green New Deal for Public Housing" is critically needed legislation that addresses the affordable housing crisis many of the same families we work with are facing. The lack of high-quality affordable public housing is holding back communities and forcing people to make terrible choices between paying rent, buying food, filling prescriptions, or providing for the academic needs of their children. No parent or guardian should ever have to make these kinds of choices. Every person is entitled to enjoy a quality of life that meets their physical, emotional, social, and basic economic needs. That is why we support the intent of this legislation.

The type of public housing your bill promotes will not only meet the housing needs of its residents but also address a variety of other life situations that may have become barriers to sustainable economic mobility, like job training, childcare, and a healthy environment. We would encourage you to include sustainably built and nature infused outdoor playspaces as part of the design of these housing facilities. Outdoor play is vital to a young person's healthy development. Not only do they encourage children to get the CDC recommended 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous daily physical activity, but they also help reduce anxiety and stress by providing children with spaces for positive peer-to-peer interactions, confidence building through risk-taking, and time away from social media. The positive mental health benefits of unstructured play were cited in the Surgeon General's 2021 public health advisory, *Protecting Youth Mental Health*, which specifically recommended communities invest in the creation of parks and playgrounds as a means to address the growing youth mental health crisis.

Playspaces that also incorporate natural play elements and access to nature serve can also serve additional purposes. They reduce the impacts of heat islands found in many residential neighborhoods where people of color live while also giving residents of every age a chance to experience the positive effects of being in

nature even while living in the city. When designed in this nature infused and climate forward manner, playspaces can contribute positively to a community's climate mitigation and adaptation strategy. Natural materials absorb less heat than plastic or metal playspaces and when combined with trees and community gardens can help improve air quality and become a natural heat oasis that can also teach the importance of conservation and environmental stewardship.

We hope that you see how our work to address playspace inequity and close the nature gap complements your efforts to combat the housing crisis our nation faces. Housing is an important part of a built community but to make housing into a home there should be other amenities available that meet the broad spectrum of a family's needs. Outdoor play is one of those amenities and we hope you will include language to support its creation in your legislation.

If your offices would like to discuss this matter further we would be happy to meet with you and present additional evidence of the positive effect of our work and the importance of play in children's lives. Thank you for your efforts on behalf of people who have been impacted by the lack of quality affordable housing and please let us know if we can provide any additional support to raise awareness of this issue.

Sincerely,

Ronda Jackson  
Vice President, Policy, Advocacy and Evaluation