



## **KABOOM!'s Comments to the USDA Regarding Revised Community Facilities Program Eligibility**

KABOOM! is the national nonprofit dedicated to ending playspace inequity in communities across the country. We work in and with communities whose play infrastructure needs have been historically unmet or disinvested from. Our work varies on the type of community partnership we form. Through our 25 in 5 Initiative to End Playspace Inequity we work with systems level partners, such as school districts or municipal parks systems, to assess and address their playspace inequities at scale over a period of several years and encompassing dozens of playspace projects. In other communities we work with specific neighborhood partners to address a hyper-local need which has been identified and requires a near-term solution. In whatever way we engage with a partner, people centered design and community mobilization are at the core of how we address the outdoor recreational needs of the children we serve.

By engaging communities in a participatory design process, we ensure that the playspaces installed are meeting the needs of residents while also giving them a sense of ownership over the space that will foster a sense of belonging which helps enhance the joy children will derive from its use. We also invite community members to help install the playground, which helps mobilize people around the issues of playspace inequity in their neighborhood and beyond. This is an issue that impacts everyone, in both large cities as well as rural towns. Including playspaces in the list of eligible Community Facilities projects would therefore expand the number of playspaces children would be able to access.

KABOOM! supports the Department's exploration of an expanded list of community facilities to include recreational facilities and while identifying outdoor recreational infrastructure, like hiking/biking trails and public pools, is important limiting that expansion to just those would fail to adequately meet the needs of younger children whose play interests are going to be different from their older peers. Playground equipment placement can enhance and complement other types of outdoor infrastructure, like adding a swing in a children's rest areas on a long hiking trail, or as a standalone destination, like a schoolyard or community playspaces. Making playspaces an explicitly stated eligible use will provide applicants with a greater variety of outdoor recreational options for their communities and the confidence that they can build these features into proposals.

The benefits of play have been well documented. Outdoor physical activity has been demonstrated to contribute to better cardio-vascular health, lower rates of diabetes, lower rates of obesity, and better dexterity.

Additionally, playspaces have been shown to help protect youth mental health. In a 2021 public health advisory from the Surgeon General on Protecting Youth Mental Health, parks and playgrounds were identified as something communities should invest in to help prevent or mitigate against poor youth mental health because of the opportunities they provide for positive social interactions between children. Those interactions are key to combatting feelings of social isolation, anxiety, and stress that often children who are suffering from poor mental health often experience.

This is why we feel that playspaces are essential community facilities which serve a broad spectrum of needs, from affordable and accessible childcare activities for families to more emotionally resilient elementary school students, and ought to be included in an expanded list of eligible community facilities. Thank you for your consideration of our comments.