



October 30, 2024

Secretary Helene T. Grady
Maryland Department of Budget and Management
45 Calvert St.
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Secretary Grady,

KABOOM! is a national nonprofit whose mission is to end playspace inequity in historically disinvested communities across America. During our 28-year history we have built over 17,000 playspaces in communities across the country. Since KABOOM!'s beginning we have worked closely in Maryland, especially Baltimore City and Prince George's County. Our work there has continued through the years, and today we have partnerships with Baltimore City Public Schools (City Schools), Baltimore City Recreation and Parks Department (BCRP), and the Maryland-National Capital Parks Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) to build 23 new playgrounds in high-need neighborhoods in their communities.

Addressing Playspace Inequity and Environmental Injustice

I am writing to request your Department include \$5 million in Governor Moore's 2026 budget for a pilot project that would support the renovation and construction of playgrounds across the state of Maryland in a manner consistent with the Governor's Environmental Justice initiative. The new funding stream would differ from existing programs because the playground construction it supports would not only enhance children's outdoor recreational opportunities—which improves health outcomes for kids—but also include design features that would increase the amount of available shade, restrict the use of metal and plastic materials, employ permeable surfacing, and include other features designed to address the effects of climate change.

When aggregated, the amount of space dedicated to playgrounds can represent a significant portion of a municipal government's public land. This presents local and regional governments an opportunity to leverage these spaces for multiple, mutually supportive purposes. We propose that outdoor recreational spaces, like playgrounds, also be used to support Governor Moore's Environmental Justice initiatives by providing incentives to communities to design and build their playgrounds differently. This program could simultaneously address the disparities in health outcomes that often appear in Black and brown children who grow up in areas without access to high-quality and engaging outdoor play opportunities as well as help address the heat island and poor air quality effects that are becoming more frequent during summer months. According to the U.S. Forest Service, adding tree cover can lower an area's surface temperature by 11-19 degrees Fahrenheit.

That is why encouraging communities now to think about what their children's play needs will be in the future is critical. At the same time, KABOOM! recognizes that this transition will not be easy.

Our partners at City Schools, BCRP, and M-NCPPC are already being asked to do more to meet their constituents' needs at a time when resources are becoming more constrained. Mandating these kinds of climate forward features now could have the unintended consequence of reducing children's access to play. However, a \$5 million pilot program that provides a financial incentive for communities to start constructing playgrounds in a more environmentally sensitive manner can help accelerate this evolution by creating more market demand and demonstrating the positive impact these redesigned spaces can have on people's quality of life.

2026 Legislative Bond Initiative Requests from the General Assembly

KABOOM! remains committed to advancing the work we have done with City Schools, BCRP, and M-NCPPC. All three entities are part of our national 25 in 5 Initiative to End Playspace Inequity and have committed significant resources to expanding play and recreation opportunities for Black and brown children. In addition to the local resources our partners have invested in this effort, KABOOM! has continued to secure private, public, and philanthropic resources to supplement those local investments. In addition to the funding, we are working to secure from our network of philanthropic donors, KABOOM! will seek Legislative Bond Initiative (LBI) funding during the upcoming session.

Working with our partners, we have identified the following projects as being high-priority due to the communities they serve, their existing playground equipment's condition, and their potential to help transform the broader area. These projects are:

- Ardmore Park, Prince George's County (\$155,000)
- Dr. Nathan A. Pitts-Ashburton Elementary School, Baltimore City (\$160,000)
- Gwynns Falls Elementary School, Baltimore City (\$160,000)
- Sinclair Lane Elementary School, Baltimore City (\$160,000)

The total amount of LBI funding we are seeking to secure, \$635,000, will unlock an additional half-million dollars in outside funding for these projects. We hope that the Administration will view these requests favorably as a demonstration of the benefits that can be unlocked when the public and nonprofit sectors work together.

Thank you for your consideration of our pilot program request. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact my office.

Sincerely,



Lysa Ratliff
CEO