

**Testimony of Eugenia Simmons-Taylor, President of President's Council, District 4
Before the City Council Parks Committee on Randall's Island contract
January 31, 2007**

My name is Eugenia Simmons-Taylor, and I'm the President of the President's Council, District 4 in East Harlem. The President's Council consists of representatives from all the PTAs of schools in the District. I'm here today to confirm that no one ever reached out to me or any of the other parents in our community to ask us if our schools might be able to use these fields, nor what we thought of this proposed contract.

Not the Mayor's office, not the Parks Department, not the Randall's Island Sports Foundation, or anyone else ever asked us this question. Indeed, we only heard about this outrageous deal because of the outreach efforts of Class Size Matters.

Right now, our schools desperately need access to more sports fields. We have only eight ball fields that are shared among 58 public schools in District 4.

This is why our Council and the Community Education Council passed resolutions against giving 20 private schools the right to monopolize most of the fields on the Island for the next 20 years.

I am also the President of the PTA of the Young Women's Leadership School, and I can tell you that our school indeed could use these fields tomorrow if they were made available to us. The only team sport we are able to offer is track, because our students can run in Central Park. But we would love to have other sports like soccer and softball, and we could if we could only have access to fields in which to practice and compete. We want our students to be well-rounded, and this means engaging in both academic and physical activities. We also could afford to pay for transportation, staffing and equipment, because we are lucky enough to have private funds that flow into our school because of the generosity and ongoing fundraising efforts of our staff as well as our founder and president, Ann Tisch.

Other schools in the district or elsewhere might need more financial support to form teams – either through their own fundraising efforts or with help from the Department of Education. Surely as a city we could afford this, given that the Governor has said that we will receive more than \$3 billion more in aid over the next four years for our schools, and the city is supposed to contribute more than \$2 billion in additional funds as well.

Instead of selling away the rights to these fields for 20 years, and selling our public school students short, our elected officials should be helping them by providing them the resources – and the fields – they really need.

We urge the City Council to take the lead, and reach out to all public schools in the vicinity of Randall's Island, whether they're in the Bronx, Manhattan, Queens or elsewhere, and survey them as to what their actual needs might be in terms of access to sports fields, and what barriers might exist preventing them from forming teams.

We cannot leave this important problem to the officials at the Parks Department, the Randall's Island Foundation, or sadly enough, to the Department of Education to solve, for none of them have shown any real interest in providing our children with the opportunities they need to play sports and engage in other physical activities.