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Norman Siegel: (212) 532-7586; (347) 907-0867
Alan M. Klinger: (212) 806-5818

This morning, arguments were heard for about an hour in the lawsuit to block the city from granting a concession consisting of most of the sports fields on Randall's Island during after-school hours to a consortium of twenty private schools for the next twenty years. This case involves serious issues of privatization of public parkland and the failure of city agencies to follow the rule of law.

At the New York State Supreme Court at 111 Centre St., Judge Shirley Kornreich heard from both sides over whether the lawsuit can be widened to include the lack of proper environmental review and competitive bidding.

Last June, the lawsuit was originally filed by civil rights attorney Norman Siegel and Alan M. Klinger of the firm Stroock & Stroock & Lavan on behalf of public school parents and community residents. The lawsuit focuses on the failure of the city to follow the review process known as ULURP, as set down in the City Charter and the City Planning regulations, that requires that all major projects of this kind be reviewed by the local Community Board, the Borough President, and the City Council. Today's arguments also dealt with the additional failures of the city to do the proper environmental review as well as follow the requirements for competitive bidding.

Comments and contact information from plaintiffs and supporters are below:

"I felt very good about our day in court," said Marina Ortiz, an East Harlem community advocate and co-plaintiff in the suit. "It's important to challenge the City's failure to undergo community and environmental review to ensure that the law is followed in matters regarding public parkland," said Ortiz.

Plaintiff Eugenia Simmons-Taylor, a parent leader in East Harlem and former president of the District 4 Presidents Council, said: "Public school parents in East Harlem joined this fight because our children are being excluded from having equal access to the Randall's Island sports fields for the next 20 years. This is a sweetheart deal with the private schools that is unjust and we've got to stop it before it's too late

"All children deserve an equal opportunity to play on old, new and future sports fields," said Matthew Washington, a plaintiff and member of Community Board 11 in East Harlem.

"Privatization of public land is completely unacceptable; public parks need to remain accessible to all members of the public at all operational times."

As Patrick J. Sullivan, appointee to the Panel for Education Policy by Manhattan Borough President Stringer points out, "Randall's Island represents more than 170 acres of public playing fields while hundreds of public schools are starved for access to fields. There is no defensible justification for handing over exclusive access for the Randall's Island fields via no-bid contracts. Public school students deserve equitable access to these fields, not this raw deal

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