

**Testimony of Eugenia Simmons-Taylor,  
former President of the President's Council, District 4 and former PTA President of The  
Young Women's Leadership School  
before the City Council Parks Committee on Randall's Island  
September 22, 2008**

My name is Eugenia Simmons-Taylor, and I was the President of the President's Council, District 4 in East Harlem during the 2005-7 school years. The Presidents Council is the organization of the 34 PA's/ PTA's presidents in the district. I am also on the board of Class Size Matters, a citywide advocacy group dedicated to achieving smaller classes and more equitable conditions for NYC public school students.

When the proposal was disclosed in the fall of 2006 that the city intended to give a no-bid contract to lease most of the sports fields on Randall's Island to a small group of private schools for the next twenty years, no city official or member of the Randall's Island Sports Foundation ever consulted us or even informed us of their plans. When subsequently, there was a community meeting called in East Harlem by the City Comptroller, the Manhattan Borough President and the City Council, no one invited us or any of the other elected PTA presidents or parent leaders in the area to attend.

It was only because Class Size Matters alerted me and other parent leaders in East Harlem of what was happening and told us about the meeting, that I was able to attend. Not surprisingly, I was shocked and aghast that anyone would even think of making such an outrageously unfair deal.

Our public schools desperately need access to more sports fields. We have only eight ball fields, shared among 58 public schools in District 4. This is why after learning about the proposal our Presidents Council and the Community Education Council passed resolutions against it.

Subsequently, we wrote letters, gave testimony and met with the head of the Randall's Island Sports Foundation, asking them to stop it, to no avail. No one listened to our pleas and the deal passed the city's Franchise and Concession Review Committee on February 14. So it was with great relief that a lawsuit was filed in June 2007 to block the deal, and our Presidents Council voted unanimously to become plaintiffs.

And though thankfully, we won our lawsuit to block this outrageous deal with the private schools, the Foundation is still going ahead with its plans to redevelop the island and privatize much of its operations, so that only the rich will be afford to play golf and tennis on it.

The Foundation will also control the allocation of the sports fields, so it's quite possible that the private schools will continue to monopolize most of the new fields as well as the old ones, since the Foundation's board is controlled by an elite group who do not represent the community, many of whom are private school parents.

We demand that all work on Randall's Island be halted before there is further destruction of the Island, and a new board should be created with majority members from the community and parent groups from the area and citywide.

Only then will there be the chance that this precious island, owned by the public, will be maintained and operated for the public good, rather than continue to be controlled by a few, well-connected people who are trying to transform it into a private country club for the wealthy.