



Support Urban Parks in Infrastructure Bonds Policy Paper

The Center for Law in the Public Interest (the Center) supports (1) significant funding for urban parks in any infrastructure bond this year as part of a comprehensive plan to promote economic, environmental, and equitable development for all, and (2) making sure that underserved communities receive their fair share of those public benefits. We urge you to write to Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and California's legislative leaders to support these goals.

Regions and cities around the state reflect the need for urban parks, including Oakland and the Bay Area, and Fresno. The Los Angeles region, for example, is park poor, and there are unfair disparities in access to parks and recreation. Children of color living in poverty with no access to cars have the worst access to parks and recreation (map 201). (All Maps and Charts are available at www.clipi.org.) Too many people live more than half a mile from the nearest park (map 202). Children of color disproportionately live in the state assembly districts with the highest levels of child obesity and the worst access to parks and recreation (map 601). This is the first generation in the history of the country in which children will have a lower life expectancy than their parents if present trends in obesity and other diseases related to inactivity continue.

There are unfair disparities in access to parks and recreation by Assembly District and Senate District. Thus, for example, Speaker Fabian Nuñez's District 46 has only .51 net acres of urban parks per thousand residents, compared to 283 net acres in Senate District 37. Senator Kevin Murray's District 26 has only 1.18 net acres of urban parks per thousand residents, compared to 160 in Senate District 17. The disparities are even more dramatic if total acres of parks including forests and other large natural open spaces are included, as illustrated by the charts and graphs for State Assembly Districts and State Senate Districts. For example, Speaker Nuñez's District 46 has only .51 total acres of parks per thousand residents, compared to 3,348.72 in District 37 (217A), and Senator Murray's District 26 has only 2.31 total acres of parks per thousand residents, compared to 827.97 total acres in District 17 (220A).

According to a survey by the Public Policy Institute of California, 64% of Californians believe that poorer communities have less than their fair share of well-maintained parks and recreational facilities. [Mark Baldasare, Public Policy Institute of California Statewide Survey: Special Survey on Californians and the Environment vi (June 2002)].

The urban park movement, and the greening of the Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers, offers the opportunity to revitalize urban communities with economic, environmental, and equitable development for all. The shared use of parks and schools can alleviate the lack of places to play and recreate, while making optimal use of scarce land and public resources. This is demonstrated by the map of parks and schools with five acres or more of playing fields (map 502).

California faces an historic opportunity to improve the quality of life enjoyed by our residents for generations to come. Strategic infrastructure investments will enhance the economic competitiveness of the state, increase social equity, and improve the environment. Infrastructure plans should be guided by statewide interests, but tailored by region to meet particular needs and priorities.

Urban parks, open space and related human health issues are a critical component of any state, regional, and local infrastructure plan for livable, just communities. Urban parks promote the core values at stake in building public infrastructure: providing children the simple joys of playing in the park; improving health and recreation; equal access to public resources; democratic participation in deciding the future of the community; economic vitality for all with increased property values, local jobs, small business contracts, and affordable housing; spiritual values in protecting people and the earth; the environmental benefits of clean air, water, and ground; and sustainable regional planning.
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