



# Township of Northampton

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October 18, 2019

Pennsylvania House of Representatives  
Children and Youth Committee  
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Subject: Impact of Pre-School Legislation

Dear Committee,

Serving as Director of Parks and Recreation for Northampton Township since 1988, I have witnessed tremendous growth of the Township. With that growth, the community looked to the Township's Parks and Recreation Department to fulfill certain needs. One of the needs was the continuation and increase of recreational programs for preschool age children.

Prior to my career with Northampton Township, Parks and Recreation offered a camp program, as well as, a handful of special interest classes for preschool age children. These classes took place in the Township Administration Building and camps took place in School District facilities. Thirty-two years later these quality camps continue in the schools and the programs at the Recreation Center.

Northampton Township has conducted a camp for preschool age children since 1986 as well as individual programs for preschoolers prior to then. The success and quality of those programs created the desire for the community to request additional programs for that age group. In 1989, a program entitled "Preschool Potpourri" was created and quickly became a popular program. Due to its success, it grew to be a multiple day and multiply hour program. The program currently involves over 60 children who participate in a two day, three day or five day program. Preschool Potpourri has been in operation as a 5 day a week program since 1995. Before embarking on the multiple day program we contacted both the Department of Education and the Department of Public Welfare to see if we needed licensing. Neither Department felt Township Parks and Recreation Programs were within their responsibility. In addition, we were informed that the PA Education Act 1988-11 allowed us to operate without a license. The PA Education Act 1988-11, states that "licenses shall not apply to .....schools or classes operated by or under the authority of the Commonwealth or any political subdivision thereof....." We continued to operate under this statement as we were never notified by the State of any changes to the law. That is no excuse to not abide by the laws of the Commonwealth. However, in operating the programs the Parks and Recreation Department is governed by local laws and ordinances that are in place to protect the safety of the children and other participants who use the Township and School District facilities.

According to the Child Care Regulations which became effective in 2008, it appears that municipalities which offer programs for an hour to three hours long are held to the same standards as facilities that provide full day care. As you may now know, many municipalities have cancelled their programs citing the restrictions and regulations set forth by the Department of Human Services Office of Child Development and Early Learning. I know it was not the State's intention to have Parks and Recreation Departments cancel quality programs that have benefitted the communities for decades. However, that is the consequence of the regulations.

I am concerned and even confused as to how the Township could obtain certification for the schools. However, I have little apprehension about Northampton Township facilities and staff being able to be certified. With that being said and based on some of my colleague's experiences, my own experiences with OCDEL's staff and the absolute fear that our programs would be halted, I have hesitated to apply for Child Care Licensing. I trust that my testimony will not jeopardize the status of our long-standing programs.

I am asking that the State recognize the worth of the many Municipal Parks and Recreation Departments that operate facilities and programs within their own jurisdictions. I am requesting that the State reexamine the regulations and consider the consequences placed on the local communities and on the already over-burdened Pennsylvania Department of Welfare. Lastly, please consider the Pennsylvania Recreation and Parks Society's request to exempt Parks and Recreation Department from Child Care licensing requirements.

Thank you!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Nancy Opalka".

Nancy Opalka  
Director of Northampton Township