

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA

JOINT LEGISLATIVE AIR AND WATER POLLUTION

CONTROL AND CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

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IN RE: PUBLIC HEARING ON THE CONTRIBUTIONS AND
CHALLENGES OF FRIENDS GROUPS FOR PENNSYLVANIA'S STATE
PARKS AND FORESTS

* * * * *

BEFORE: REPRESENTATIVE PARKE WENTLING, CHAIR
Representative Stephen McCarter, Member
Tony M. Guerrieri, Executive Director

HEARING: Thursday, October 22, 2020
10:16 a.m.

LOCATION: Salus University
8360 Old York Road
Elkins Park, PA 19027

WITNESSES: Kathryn Ott Lovell, Maura McCarthy, Linde
Lauff, Ruffian Tittmann, Ken Butensky, Janet Bernstein

Reporter: Kimberly Chatburn

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A P P E A R A N C E S

1
2
3
4
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8
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12
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ALSO PRESENT:

REPRESENTATIVE MICHAEL J. DRISCOLL,
PA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES GENERAL ASSEMBLY
Coleen Engrall

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21
22
23
24
25

I N D E X

OPENING REMARKS	5 - 9
By Chairman Wentling	
DISCUSSION AMONG PARTIES	9 - 17
TESTIMONY	
By Ms. Lovell	17 - 24
TESTIMONY	
By Ms. McCarthy	24 - 28
TESTIMONY	
By Ms. Lauff	28 - 33
TESTIMONY	
By Ms. Tittmann	33 - 37
DISCUSSION AMONG PARTIES	37 - 53
CERTIFICATE	54

E X H I B I T S

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
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21
22
23
24
25

<u>Number</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Page</u> <u>Offered</u>
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P R O C E E D I N G S

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CHAIR: Good morning, everybody. I'm Parke Wentling, State Representative, 17th Legislative District. I'm the Chairman of the Joint Legislative Conservation Committee. I'd like to thank everyone here for attending this public hearing in person and virtually. I also want to thank my colleague, Mr. McCarter, State Representative of the 154 Legislative District and for hosting the committee here at the Salus University, and thank you very much for having us.

13

Before we begin, I'd like to take some time for introductions. Beginning with my fellow committee members, we have a number of committee members. Well, I think we have McCarter here in person, but if you just want to take some time, turn your microphone on, introduce yourself and then I'll continue with my remarks.

20

REPRESENTATIVE MCCARTER: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Again, it is my pleasure to be here. I'm Representative Steve McCarter from the 154 District here in Eastern Montgomery County.

24

CHAIR: I believe we may have some members of the committee on here virtually. Maybe you

25

1 want to take a moment. If there are members of the
2 actual committee, Senate and House, if you want to
3 take a moment to unmute yourself and see if you can
4 introduce yourselves.

5 Is anyone out there in cyberspace?

6 Okay.

7 We don't necessarily have, that we
8 know of at this point, any specific members of the
9 committee that have been able to join us virtually.
10 We also have some members of the General Assembly. We
11 have a member of the General Assembly here. We may
12 have some folks, either part of the General Assembly
13 or their staff, are virtually here. But we'll start
14 out with Mr. Driscoll.

15 If you want to take a moment to introduce yourself?

16 REPRESENTATIVE DRISCOLL: Sure. Good
17 morning, thank you for having me. This campus is
18 beautiful. My first time on this campus.

19 Representative McCarter, I'm jealous. I have Holy
20 Family in my district, which I'm very proud of, but
21 it's good seeing you again. I think it's appropriate
22 for the committee to recognize the beauty of nature.

23 So I represent Northeast Philadelphia
24 and happen to be part of today's hearing and will look
25 forward to getting into some hearty issues as the day

1 progresses. Thank you.

2 CHAIR: Thank you very much. So I'm
3 just going through some - we'll take a moment here, if
4 there's anyone that has joined us virtually that is a
5 member of the General Assembly, or a staff member
6 would like to take a moment?

7 Joe, I think you're trying to speak
8 there if you would unmute. Unfortunately, Joe, we
9 can't hear you, but we're going to keep trying here.
10 So go ahead. Or if there's anything that I can do
11 from here.

12 MS. PLUMMER: I can hear him on my
13 phone, so maybe it's the speakers in here.

14 CHAIR: Okay.

15 So I understand that the rest of the
16 virtual world heard you, but unfortunately we did not.
17 We'll try to work on that. There may be something I
18 could actually do right from this screen. But I'll
19 probably let someone else try to do that. Is there
20 anyone else other than Mr. Webster there that is on
21 the call?

22 I'm sure that was excellent. We
23 couldn't hear you, but everyone else out in cyberspace
24 did. Is - is it Shawn?

25 Okay. Okay. Thank you very much.

1 We'll try to get it so we can actually
2 hear in the room.

3 So in addition - and we obviously have
4 some other folks that have joined us and we'll have
5 all the guests at some point hopefully have the
6 opportunity to speak here.

7 But in addition, some quick
8 housekeeping items. During the hearing, each
9 testifier will present information first and at the
10 end of the hearing we will allow for questions from
11 members and those in attendance. I kindly ask that
12 you please hold your questions and comments until all
13 testimony has been presented. Thank you.

14 The purpose of today's hearing is to
15 examine the contributions and challenges of friends
16 groups. Friends groups are nonprofits that support
17 Pennsylvania state parks and forests. As many of you
18 may be aware, the committee held a similar public
19 hearing last month on this topic.

20 Just to provide a brief overview,
21 again, there are 46 friends groups located throughout
22 the Commonwealth who contribute their time, expertise
23 and privately raise funds to support Pennsylvania's
24 state parks and forests. These groups vary in size
25 and structure and funding expertise.

1 Friends groups are committed to both
2 boosting public support of parks and forests as well
3 as public use and enjoyment of those resources given
4 the many recreational opportunities they offer
5 citizens.

6 So today's testifiers include
7 Philadelphia Parks and Recreation, Fairmount Park
8 Conservancy and representatives from former and
9 present friends groups who will discuss initiatives
10 and some of the challenges they face along the way.
11 Testifying this morning are - and I hope I get all
12 these correct, and please correct me when you have the
13 opportunity to speak, is Kathryn Ott Lovell.

14 MS. LAUFF: She's on. She's virtual.

15 CHAIR: Okay.

16 Well she can't respond because we
17 can't hear them. So hopefully I got that right. The
18 Commissioner of Parks and Recreation, Maria (sic)
19 McCarthy, Executive Director of Fairmount Park
20 Conservancy.

21 MS. LAUFF: It's actually Maura.

22 REPRESENTATIVE MCCARTER: Maura.

23 MS. PLUMMER: Maura.

24 CHAIR: Maura? Okay.

25 Can you say that again for me?

1 MS. LAUFF: M-A-U-R-A, Maura.

2 CHAIR: Okay.

3 Unfortunately, that wasn't the way it
4 was written in my description. Thank you very much.
5 Thank you.

6 Linde, I believe it's - is it Lauff?

7 MS. LAUFF: Yes.

8 CHAIR: Former president of Friends of
9 Pennypack Park. And - is it -?

10 MS. LAUFF: Ruffian.

11 CHAIR: Ruffian - that's a cool name -
12 Ruffian -.

13 MS. PLUMMER: Tittman.

14 CHAIR: Tittmann, Executive Director
15 of the Friends of -.

16 REPRESENTATIVE MCCARTER: Wissahickon.

17 MS. LAUFF: Wissahickon.

18 CHAIR: We're just going to let them
19 say it, okay. Thank you.

20 Today - thank you so much for these
21 testifiers being among us this morning and sharing
22 your insight. We look forward to learning more. So
23 we're going to go right now and just simply turn the
24 floor over to Representative McCarter letting him
25 present his testifiers and kind of do things from

1 there.

2 So thank you very much everyone, and
3 hopefully we get to the point where we can hear
4 everyone out there in cyberspace. Thank you.

5 REPRESENTATIVE MCCARTER: Good
6 morning, everyone. And thank you very much, Mr.
7 Chairman, for giving us this opportunity today. It's
8 very, very important here and I think that we're going
9 to talk about a number of issues dealing with the
10 friends of the parks and the parks across the state,
11 both local, state and national for that matter, that
12 all have challenges but at the same time do wonderful,
13 wonderful things.

14 So, first of all, I want to thank
15 President Mittelman and Salus University again for the
16 use of their facilities. That is a very, very
17 wonderful thing that you've been so helpful bringing
18 in the community here and sharing these wonderful
19 facilities to give us the opportunity to hold state
20 hearings and other meetings here as well. So thank
21 you very much.

22 And again, to our chairman,
23 Representative Parke Wentling for making the journey
24 all the way down from Erie to be with us today. And
25 to give the opportunity to talk about this problem

1 that exists within some of the friends groups across
2 the state.

3 Thanks to Tony Guerrieri, our
4 Executive Director, for all your efforts in setting
5 this up today. This has been a marvelous opportunity
6 I think for all of us.

7 It's very clear, raging with the
8 pandemic that we're dealing with across the state and
9 across the country and across the world. It's become
10 very apparent that the importance of parks, the
11 importance of the outside is so crucial to all of us
12 everyday. And that is seen by anybody who travels to
13 any one of the parks and how proud they are and how
14 filled they are.

15 Recently, my wife and I went to one
16 local state park here and we thought we were at
17 Woodstock. There were so many people in the park,
18 quite honestly. And somewhat disconcerting during the
19 pandemic, but at the same time people want to be
20 outside, people want to do those things.

21 The friends of the parks groups along
22 with all the state employees that work in these parks
23 have done a phenomenal job in trying to keep these
24 parks operating at a time under great strain. And
25 again, that's one of the issues that we're looking at.

1 The friends groups have done
2 marvelous, marvelous things. They're not only raising
3 additional funds, not only providing services and
4 helping to clean the parks and set the trails, and
5 have done so many of those things that, again, we just
6 don't seem to have resources always to support across
7 the state. But they've done phenomenal things.

8 And so we want to thank them very much
9 for their effort. And again, we look forward today to
10 hear more of that testimony of the good things that
11 are happening and also then to challenge ourselves to
12 solve some of the problems that they face.

13 I have to say that, you know, over the
14 years and as a state representative, we have looked at
15 some big challenges, one being climate change. And we
16 know that the parks are being influenced in that
17 direction. But so much of the issues of climate
18 change which are long term that we will have to deal
19 with start at the local level. They start at the base
20 level. They start with all of us in the parks and the
21 help that the friends groups in particular are able to
22 bring to help with these issues.

23 So today's testimony I hope will highlight
24 some of the good things and also some of the problems
25 that we need to face. And that's, you know, why I'm

1 so happy to be able to be here today to support as
2 well. So again, I want to turn this over next to my
3 good friend, Representative Mike Driscoll, who has a
4 few comments to make, too, about some pending
5 legislation that may help the situation. Thank you.

6 REPRESENTATIVE DRISCOLL: Thank you,
7 Representative McCarter. Also, let me recognize our
8 Chairman, Parke Wentling. Parke and I are classmates
9 from 2014. We both came in together and it's a
10 pleasure to serve with him. I look forward to his
11 continued leadership of this community because we
12 certainly need this on these issues we're going to
13 talk about today more than ever. And Tony, thank you
14 for what you do for the committee. And I need you to
15 be nice to Denice because Denice and I used to work
16 together in the Casey Administration. So be very,
17 very nice to her.

18 And of course, the bad news today is
19 we're losing Representative McCarter. He has chosen
20 to - after a long career in teaching and a very, very
21 impactful career in the House of Representatives,
22 Representative McCarter will be moving to his next
23 chapter in life.

24 And I'll tell you firsthand,
25 Representative, that you will be sorely missed, on

1 these issues in particular. When there are
2 environmental concerns, you know, I look to you and
3 your leadership when I made my votes over the last six
4 years because you studied these issues and you
5 understand these issues and you're going to be sorely
6 missed. And thank you for your service.

7 REPRESENTATIVE MCCARTER: Thank you.

8 REPRESENTATIVE DRISCOLL: I know we
9 have a long agenda so I just want to be brief. The
10 City of Philadelphia has 150 parks. And certainly not
11 the resources to take care of those parks. I'm very
12 proud that Commissioner Lovell will be here today
13 testifying because she's doing a remarkable job with
14 dwindling resources. And certainly after this
15 pandemic, all the budgets across the Commonwealth in
16 every county of Pennsylvania is going to be shrinking.

17 And so the friends of groups have
18 always been critical to helping but now more than
19 ever, they're going to be needed. And when you think
20 about the issue of liability that's putting all these
21 friends groups out of business, we certainly got a
22 Herculean task in front of us to cure the problem to
23 get these friends groups back together and back in the
24 parks helping. Because without them, we're going to
25 revert to years ago when you couldn't even go into the

1 parks because of problems that we were having across
2 the Commonwealth.

3 And so a couple - some time ago, Maura
4 McCarthy and Linde Lauff visited with me to share with
5 me firsthand, and you'll hear it in their testimony
6 today, what they have been experiencing. When you
7 think about it, on a Saturday most people work two
8 jobs. And then they volunteer in their local park to
9 just do the right thing and clean up and those sorts
10 of things. And the next thing you know they're
11 getting a lawsuit and they're a party to a lawsuit. I
12 mean, come on, let's wake up, Pennsylvania. And
13 that's what initiated my House Bill 2310.

14 I conversed with Commissioner Lovell's
15 office, her deputy, Tom Forkin who's also an attorney,
16 he weighed in. I have to give a shout out to the City
17 of Philadelphia's Law Department. Their analysis and
18 comments and input into 2310 were critical. And then
19 of course, we introduced it early this session and we
20 thought we had some momentum and then of course you
21 all know, in March the pandemic hit.

22 But I'm not using that as an excuse.
23 I am disappointed that this has not gotten a hearing
24 in the judiciary and has not advanced. Because I
25 firmly believe that 2310 once it comes to the full

1 General Assembly will pass with overwhelming numbers.
2 All the legislative districts across the Commonwealth
3 have parks and every legislative district is impacted.
4 And for sure, let's get these friends groups the right
5 support that they need. And that's why this hearing
6 today, Chairman, is so critical.

7 So let me yield my time and get to the
8 testimony. Let's get some questions and answers and
9 let's not give up on this legislative session. We can
10 talk about it in question and answer. And if we have
11 to, it will be the first priority in 2021. So thank
12 you all.

13 MS. PLUMMER: We're just going to do a
14 little break for some technical work here.

15 ---

16 (WHEREUPON, A PAUSE IN THE RECORD WAS HELD.)

17 ---

18 MS. LOVELL: Can you guys hear me?
19 Great. Great. I get the opposite reaction in my
20 house when I'm able to speak so this is really good.
21 So my name is Kathryn Ott Lovell, I'm Commissioner for
22 Philadelphia Parks and Recreation. Before I start my
23 formal testimony I just want to extend my sincere
24 thanks to everybody for making time for us today. You
25 know, the information included in this important

1 legislation is - has been a dream of ours since - for
2 many years, probably going back 20 years.

3 Before my position at Philadelphia
4 Parks and Recreation, I did work for a nonprofit
5 that's also represented here today by Maura McCarthy
6 called the Fairmount Park Conservancy. And this has
7 been an issue that we have struggled with for a decade
8 or longer. And we are so grateful to Representative
9 Mike Driscoll to Tom Forkin from the City Law
10 Department for prioritizing this, and advocating for
11 it, and helping, you know, to move this forward. So
12 just my deepest and sincerest thanks to each and every
13 one of you here, extraordinary leadership on this.

14 So in Philadelphia, we have over 150
15 parks from neighborhood pocket parks to the 2,000
16 acres of East and West Fairmount Park. We have 166
17 miles of trails. We have 1,200 courts and athletic
18 fields. And we have a team of less than a dozen staff
19 to maintain all of these natural assets.

20 Philadelphia's park system is notable,
21 not only in its size and scope, but unfortunately also
22 for its relatively staggering lack of resources. For
23 one of the largest urban park systems in the country,
24 we stand out not just for the breath of amenities we
25 provide to residents. We stand out because the

1 Department's annual operating budget dwarfs that of
2 comparable cities.

3 Parks friends groups are
4 Philadelphia's answer to the huge gaps that exist
5 between the size and needs of our park system and the
6 resources we have to maintain it. In the 30 years
7 since our first friends group was founded, we now have
8 131 registered park friends groups. And more are
9 being established each year.

10 A park friends group is designed as a
11 group of at least three neighborhood volunteers, but
12 usually many more, who commit to caring for and
13 helping maintain one of Philadelphia's unstaffed
14 neighborhood parks. They are individuals who have
15 stepped up to cut, weed, clean, steward, sweep, and
16 beautify our parks, our trails, and our forests.

17 From planting trees to culling
18 invasive species, hosting community programs, and
19 fundraising millions of dollars to support our green
20 space, friends groups are truly incredible volunteers
21 whose work should be praised and whose role in parks
22 should be protected and supported however possible.

23 The story of parks friends groups is
24 the story of so much of the progress we see in
25 Philadelphia today. It is the story of neighbors

1 coming together to make their community cleaner,
2 safer, and a better place to raise children.

3 The first park we partnered with on
4 this journey was Malcolm X Park in West Philadelphia.
5 In 1993, Malcolm X was unsafe for families to visit.
6 It looked abandoned and overgrown and was becoming a
7 drain on their community. That year, Parks and Rec
8 met with residents and began cooperating on cleaning
9 up events, organizing fundraising for small
10 improvements, and planning ways to make the park more
11 welcoming for families.

12 Today, Malcolm X Park is beautiful.
13 It's a vibrant park that is enjoyed in the community
14 program each year. And it is a true destination for
15 neighbors. I include myself in that list as a mom who
16 visits Malcolm X regularly, as one of my family's
17 local parks.

18 The role that park friends groups play
19 in public safety cannot be overstated. They've
20 organized neighbors around the park, and in doing so,
21 keep our parks active and cleaned the best way to
22 insure safety and to dissuade negative energies. From
23 hosting movie nights to holiday events and outdoor
24 activities, park friends groups make our green space
25 active and welcome spaces that contribute to a

1 neighborhood's health and happiness, rather than
2 detracting from it.

3 Just last year, our friends groups
4 held 517 free community events in our parks.
5 Philadelphia's parks and recreation stewards 5,441
6 acres of forests, meadows, streams, and wetlands, much
7 of which is found in our large watershed parks.

8 The friends groups who support these
9 parks play a different but vitally important role.
10 Groups like the Friends of Wissahickon and the
11 Tookany/Tacony Frankford Watershed Partnership bring
12 ecological expertise to bear in providing long-term
13 stewardship and sustainability of our large urban
14 forests.

15 These larger, long-standing friends
16 groups are true partners to the city in doing the
17 incredible labor-intensive work of forestry management
18 in the middle of a large urban environment. These
19 friends groups are larger and tend to be registered
20 nonprofit 501(c)(3)s. Their work is fundamental to
21 the effective management of Philadelphia's 10,000
22 acres and parklands.

23 Finally, our park friends support us
24 in the ambitious, but critical, work to improve our
25 tree canopy. In Philadelphia, caring for the trees we

1 have and growing new trees is literally a life or
2 death issue. According to a recent study from the US
3 Forest Service, if Philadelphia can meet it's 30
4 percent tree canopy goal, we will save hundreds of
5 lives each year, currently lost to extreme weather,
6 poor air quality, and other environmental factors.

7 Without our park friends' work to
8 mulch, water, prune, and care for the trees in their
9 park, this goal would be impossible. Last year alone,
10 our park friends planted nearly 600 new trees and
11 cared for over 500 of our existing trees. Across the
12 city last year, park friends groups represented 6,100
13 individual volunteers, who collected and provided over
14 5,000 volunteer hours, carrying out critical work
15 across the park system.

16 The work they do is so very critical
17 for our park system. And we want to support them
18 through regular training, hosting citywide meetings,
19 and dedicated city staff members to call with
20 questions and support. We offer free permits to run
21 community events and support with organizing and
22 getting supplies for community days.

23 But we need to do more. Specifically,
24 we as government officials need to find a way to
25 protect this incredible volunteer group from the

1 devastating effects of litigation liability issues.

2 To this important goal of protecting
3 friends groups from unnecessary litigation liability,
4 the city at the City Department of Parks and
5 Recreation, enthusiastically supports House Bill 2310
6 as sponsored by State Representative Mike Driscoll.

7 This legislation was crafted with
8 significant input from the city's Law Department to
9 redress the crushing economic burden of wide-ranging
10 and legally inappropriate lawsuits against volunteer
11 park friends groups.

12 Specifically, these volunteer groups
13 would be shielded during their public service park
14 work from standard tier liability claims. Joining me
15 today to speak to the devastating organizational
16 impact of such lawsuits is Linde Lauff from the
17 Friends of Pennypack.

18 Linde was forced to curtail all hard
19 maintenance activities earlier this year due to the
20 organizational cost of defending against the recent
21 liability lawsuit in which the Friends of Pennypack
22 was not directly involved. I would encourage this
23 committee as well as the House Judiciary Committee to
24 support and move House Bill 2310 to the House floor
25 for a full vote as soon as possible.

1 The critical maintenance of parks
2 across the Commonwealth depends on the vital support
3 and work of these volunteer friends groups. House
4 Bill 2310 will ensure that their work can continue
5 unabated by the real threat of economic insolvency
6 through litigation. All we and they ask for is
7 equitable opportunity to continue this work as
8 dedicated citizens. Thank you so much again for your
9 time today. And I would be happy to answer any
10 questions that the Committee may have.

11 CHAIR: Coleen, would you like to
12 introduce -

13 MS. ENGVALL: We're saving questions
14 for the end, right?

15 CHAIR: Yeah, we'll go ahead and move
16 on to the next testimony. Just tell them to speak
17 into their mic.

18 MS. ENGVALL: So Maura McCarthy, you
19 can go ahead and unmute yourself. And we can hear
20 your testimony. Thank you.

21 MS. MCCARTHY: All right. Thank you
22 so much.

23 Kathryn, that was such a great and
24 succinct summary of this complicated issue. I just
25 want to make sure can everybody actually hear me?

1 MS. PLUMMER: Yes.

2 MS. MCCARTHY: Okay. Good.

3 So I too want to add my voice to
4 Kathryn's to thank Representative Driscoll for pushing
5 forward on a much-needed bill. We are so grateful for
6 the time and attention and for Kathryn's vision from
7 both sides of the aisle, so to speak, as both a
8 representative of a community group and as an
9 administrator for a major public department. She has
10 a really intimate understanding of how complex this
11 is.

12 So I also want to thank today Chairman
13 Wentling, Representative McCarter, and all the members
14 of this Committee for taking the time and hearing
15 testimony. As noted, I'm Maura McCarthy. I'm the
16 executive director of the Fairmount Park Conservancy,
17 the nonprofit partner at Philadelphia's Department of
18 Parks and Recreation.

19 Fairmount Park Conservancy supports
20 city owned and operated parks, playgrounds and
21 programs. We champion our communities and parks by
22 undertaking capital projects and restoring
23 preservation efforts, fostering neighborhood park
24 stewardship, attracting and leveraging financial
25 investment, and developing innovative programs

1 throughout the 10,200 acres that include Fairmount
2 Park and more than 200 neighborhood parks around the
3 city.

4 In 2019, we welcomed hundreds of
5 thousands of visitors in Philadelphia's parks,
6 supported the 131 park friends groups that Kathryn
7 mentioned all around the city, and helped the city in
8 the completion of a master plan for FDR Park in South
9 Philadelphia.

10 We also improved the health of 3,700
11 Philadelphians with just one of our community
12 programs, the seasonal We Walk Program. And all
13 together, we invested nearly \$4 billion in
14 programming, stewardship, and capital initiatives in
15 Philadelphia parks in 2019.

16 The Conservancy employs 24 full-time
17 staff, dozens of seasonal workers and hosts a local
18 planning, designing and construction program. As
19 Kathryn noted, nonprofit partners in Philadelphia
20 Parks and Recreation face many challenges. But the
21 one that is particularly concerning to us now is the
22 fact that we and our peers are subject to frivolous
23 lawsuits as a result of our partnership activities
24 with the City.

25 Typically, nonprofit groups are sued

1 along with the City because their volunteer service
2 work is recognizable and unlike our partners at the
3 City, there is no state or local cap on the
4 recoverable damages that can be claimed from our
5 nonprofits. This makes the City's nonprofit
6 departments desirable targets to trial lawyers even
7 when the nonprofit's work has nothing to do with the
8 conditions that gave rise to the lawsuit.

9 In just the last few months, for
10 instance, the Conservancy has been named codefendant
11 with the City in two legal cases that occurred on City
12 properties with which we have no affiliation. Though
13 these suits are typically dismissed, any legal fees
14 incurred in the dismissal by our insurers are noted on
15 our loss rent sheet and drive our insurance costs up.

16 In 2019, the Conservancy faced a 140
17 percent increase for basic insurance services for the
18 2020 fiscal year. And we learned that due to our loss
19 rent sheet, we're unable to bundle our insurance
20 portfolio at any price. If we do not modify the
21 incentive for inclusion of nonprofit partners in
22 lawsuits against the City, we and many other valuable
23 community partners, many like the Friends of
24 Pennypack, eventually will be unable to obtain the
25 required insurance coverage at any price and be forced

1 to cease operation.

2 Since 2015, the Conservancy, Friends
3 of Wissahickon, Friends of Rittenhouse Square and now
4 sadly the defunct Friends of Pennypack have all worked
5 very closely with Philadelphia's Parks and Recreation
6 and the Law Departments to consider how to reduce
7 liability to these friends groups. We are so grateful
8 for the partnership and leadership of the Parks and
9 Recreation, our senior staff and the City legal team
10 as we collectively work on a solution while executing
11 our mission.

12 And we are likewise grateful for the
13 leadership of Representative Driscoll, who championed
14 nonprofits working on public lands through his
15 sponsorship of House Bill 2310. And of course, we are
16 particularly grateful for the members of this
17 committee who made the space to discuss the vital role
18 of nonprofit public space partners and the challenges
19 before it. Thank you so much for your time.

20 CHAIR: If you want to come up to the
21 mic here, she's going to unmute you and mute everyone
22 else. Thank you very much.

23 MS. LAUFF: Good morning, everyone.
24 Hello, Committee, Chairman Wentling and Committee
25 Members, I'm very grateful to be here today. I'm

1 Linde Lauff. I'm the recent past president of the now
2 dissolved Friends of Pennypack Park. It was my
3 insight that only state legislation action would
4 prevent what happened to the Friends of Pennypack Park
5 from happening to other park friends groups. It was
6 after approaching State Representative Michael
7 Driscoll that I felt organizations like ours could be
8 protected. Volunteer park groups need to be protected
9 from frivolous lawsuits. This is why House Bill 2310
10 is so important.

11 Please let me explain why I'm so
12 passionate about this issue. On November 1st, 2020,
13 our volunteer organization of 33 years ceased to exist
14 due to a lack of liability insurance to protect the
15 Friends of Pennypack Park. Our organization had been
16 sued in the spring of 2019. We believed the lawsuit
17 should have been dismissed, as no one in our
18 organization had any direct involvement in the
19 accident which occurred along the trail in the park.
20 But the plaintiff attorney felt they had a case. And
21 after much preparation by our attorneys to go to
22 trial, our insurance company negotiated a settlement
23 with the plaintiff attorneys.

24 As expected, in late February 2020,
25 prior to the annual renewal, we received notice that

1 our insurance company would not be renewing our
2 coverage. We attempted to find coverage, but we could
3 not find any insurance who'd be willing to provide us
4 with liability coverage.

5 Let me now take another step back in
6 time. You see, this 2019 lawsuit is the second
7 lawsuit our organization has received. The first was
8 in 2012, after a kid drowned in the Pennypack Creek.
9 Again, none of our volunteers had any involvement in
10 this child's death. People are not allowed to swim in
11 Pennypack Creek. But several children dove into the
12 creek after a storm when the water levels are high and
13 the current strong. One child lost his life.

14 We also lost our insurance coverage
15 after this lawsuit, but we were able to secure
16 insurance at a higher annual expense. The new
17 insurance coverage more than doubled the liability
18 coverage cost. We knew then that a second lawsuit
19 would likely make us uninsurable. As expected, this
20 is exactly what happened to the Friends of Pennypack
21 Park eight years later.

22 As the Friends of Pennypack were
23 coming to a close at the beginning of April 2020,
24 COVID-19 was hitting our friends and family. We all
25 know the impact this pandemic has had on our daily

1 lives. Please let me share with you the impact this
2 pandemic has had on Pennypack Park.

3 This park, located in the northeast
4 section of Philadelphia, is 1,688 acres. It's large.
5 The Pennypack Creek stretches from Montgomery County,
6 eight miles through the very populated area of
7 Philadelphia to the Delaware River. Every day of the
8 week, not just weekends, the parking lots surrounding
9 the park are full. Our former volunteers note
10 increased trash along the trails, as our monthly and
11 also ad lib cleanups are not occurring.

12 City employees do not pick up trash,
13 just empty trash cans. The city has relied on our
14 group to pick up trash in the park for years. We have
15 retrieved over 490 bags of trash in the past year
16 alone. Over the past ten years, the Friends of
17 Pennypack Park have picked up over four thousand bags
18 of trash and cans, representing 888 volunteer hours.
19 Our volunteers, over the years, have completed a
20 variety of projects in our efforts to make
21 improvements in the park, and there's a separate
22 accomplishment sheet that I noted with this testimony.

23 We have planted two thousand trees,
24 done stream bank reinforcement, trail cleaning,
25 erosion prevention, and planting needed gardens. We

1 have raised money through donations, membership and
2 grants to purchase large equipment like tractors,
3 water bags, and protectors for the trees, shovels,
4 rakes, wrappers, trash bags, gloves and other
5 supplies. We conduct informative monthly meetings,
6 historical and native plant articles, produce a
7 monthly newsletter, advocated for our park with the
8 City and maintained our membership numbers, all done
9 by volunteers.

10 The Friends of Pennypack Park have
11 also received awards and recognition for volunteer
12 work done, also noted separately. These awards have
13 been local, state, and national level. But our
14 volunteers do not spend countless hours for awards or
15 recognition. They do it for our community, our park
16 we love. Our volunteers bring their knowledge,
17 passion, and love of the outdoors to this
18 organization. And the park, and therefore the City,
19 has benefitted from these efforts.

20 The loss of our Friends group has
21 already been seen by regular park users. This
22 legislation is important for all the volunteers, for
23 the priceless work we do is not protected by
24 government agencies that need and want our help.
25 Therefore, this legislation is vital for the work of

1 ever thinking of reorganizing.

2 Many other local organizations, like
3 local civic associations don't want to assume
4 coordinating cleanups in our area of the park because
5 they might be sued. There are many other park groups
6 that operate without insurance placing all of their
7 officers at risk of lawsuits. I know the pain of
8 seeing a community rally behind including their local
9 park and then watching it dissolve because the legal
10 system did not protect it. This must stop or there
11 will be less volunteers and volunteer park groups
12 willing to step in to fill the void throughout the
13 state. Thank you.

14 MS. PLUMMER: You can go ahead and
15 start.

16 MS. TITTMANN: Can you hear me?

17 MS. PLUMMER: Yeah.

18 MS. TITTMANN: Okay. Thank you.

19 I just want to - before I get into my
20 formal testimony, just say that Linde gave such a
21 powerful testimony just now. And I know we all feel
22 the loss of the Friends of Pennypack here in
23 Philadelphia. So I just wanted to say that.

24 Thank you, Chairman Wentling,
25 Representative McCarter, and all the members of the

1 Committee for having me here today, my name is Ruffian
2 Tittmann. I'm the executive director of Friends of
3 Wissahickon, which is the Friends Group in the
4 Wissahickon Valley Park in the City of Philadelphia.

5 Wissahickon Valley Park comprises
6 1,800 acres of forest within the city. The creek
7 enters Philadelphia from Montgomery County. It goes
8 into a dramatic gorge seven miles long before the
9 creek eventually flows into the Schuylkill River. The
10 entire gorge is within the park. Our park is a
11 signature park within the city's ten-thousand acres of
12 parkland. It's a national natural landmark. And our
13 main trail, known as Forbidden Drive, was the 2018
14 Pennsylvania trail of the year.

15 Each year, the park receives at least
16 one and a half million visits from people seeking both
17 passive, active - passive recreation on our 57 miles
18 of trail. If you've never seen it, I hope you find
19 the time to visit. I would be delighted to give you a
20 tour. Friends of Wissahickon was founded in 1924. Of
21 the nearly 100 park friends groups in Philadelphia,
22 Friends of Wissahickon is the oldest and the first to
23 be professionally staffed.

24 Over the last decade alone, we've
25 invested well over 10 million dollars in projects and

1 programs within the park, including trail stewardship,
2 restoration of decaying structures, parking area
3 improvements, signage wayfinding, habitat restoration,
4 and educational outreach initiatives. And in addition
5 to that monetary investment, we have organized and
6 supervised several million dollars-worth of work by
7 volunteers who love the park and are committed to
8 preserving and improving it.

9 In addition, our organization
10 contributes 11 full-time positions and three to five
11 seasonal positions to the local economy, as well as
12 utilizing local contractors and consultants. All of
13 the work that our staff and volunteers do in the park
14 is coordinated and approved by the City of
15 Philadelphia's Department of Parks and Recreation or
16 the Philadelphia Water Department.

17 The city owns the park. The city is
18 responsible for the conditions of the park. And the
19 city fulfills all the work in the park, whether the
20 work is done by city employees, by contractors, or by
21 the staff and volunteers of the Friends of
22 Wissahickon. Friends of Wissahickon is proud that our
23 staff and our thousands of volunteers have been able
24 to help the city preserve, maintain, and improve the
25 park for the last 96 years. And we hope to continue

1 to provide that help for many decades to come, but we
2 face the challenge and threat of civil lawsuits.

3 I know this Committee has heard
4 testimony in September about potential lawsuits that
5 threaten the liability of the nonprofit groups that
6 support the state parks. That same challenge faces
7 the Friends of Wissahickon and other Friends Groups
8 striving to support Philadelphia's Park System. And
9 to know Pennsylvania law passed the personal injury
10 liability of municipalities, such as the City of
11 Philadelphia, at 500 thousand dollars.

12 For that reasons, some lawyers look
13 for someone else to sue along with the city, when a
14 park user sustained an injury in a Philadelphia park,
15 no matter how that injury happened or what its cause.
16 That someone else is often the Friends Group, even
17 though the Friends of Wissahickon and other such
18 groups do not own the parks, are not responsible for
19 the condition of the parks, and do no work in the
20 parks except in coordination with the city.

21 Even if these personal injury claims
22 against Friends Groups are completely without merit,
23 they threaten the continued operation of nonprofit
24 groups, like the Friends of the Wissahickon.
25 Lawsuits, like this, may make it impossible for a

1 Friends Group to procure insurance. And to be blunt,
2 if a nonprofit park friends group cannot procure
3 reasonably priced insurance, it cannot operate.

4 We have seen firsthand in Philadelphia
5 how destructive this seems to be. As we just heard,
6 after the Friends of Pennypack was sued, its insurance
7 company refused to renew its insurance policy and the
8 result was devastating. The Friends of Pennypack was
9 forced to dissolve. At this very moment, Friends of
10 Wissahickon is defending a frivolous suit. We are
11 confident that we will prevail in this lawsuit.

12 But if the Friends of Wissahickon is
13 sued because someone sustains an injury in the park,
14 we risk becoming uninsurable, which would mean that we
15 would have to dissolve. As the testimony of the
16 friends groups' at the September hearing and those
17 here today have shown, Pennsylvania's parks, city,
18 county, and state, need the resources that stewardship
19 groups pour into them. Without organizations, like
20 the Friends of Wissahickon, these wonderful parks
21 throughout our state would be in great jeopardy. And
22 I just want to thank you for convening these hearings
23 and to investigate this issue.

24 CHAIR: I hope everyone can hear me
25 out there. And what we'd like to do now is just take

1 a moment. There are a number of individuals who have
2 joined virtually. And Mr. Webster's on there. And I
3 believe he's still on. I'd like to give him the
4 opportunity to speak and maybe someone else that is
5 here.

6 If you could give Mr. Webster the
7 floor to speak so we can all hear him this time, he's
8 right here. Joe, you out there? Do you want to
9 unmute yourself? For whatever reason, we can't see
10 you. Okay, Joe, can you hear us out there, Joe? We
11 sent you a request to unmute, I believe.

12 He's unmuted, okay - okay. Anyone
13 else? Okay, what we'll do now is at this point is
14 we'll just go and open up for questions. Obviously,
15 if a member has a question, I'm not sure exactly how
16 we're going to go about that. We can do it through
17 chat. Or we - oh, excuse me. We have some folks here
18 that have a few questions.

19 So we will go ahead and start with
20 that. Yeah, I'll start. And I guess these questions
21 could go to any of our presenters. I have maybe just
22 a couple quick questions. I'll make it easy. And
23 I'll just come up front here so everyone can hear me
24 okay.

25 So Kathryn, if you're still able to be

1 with us here?

2 MS. LOVELL: I'm here.

3 CHAIR: Great. Thank you very much.

4 And we can actually hear you, so just
5 wondering if you have any kind of affiliation with
6 PPF? I believe that's kind of exclusive to the state
7 parks and state forests. Have you considered a model
8 such as that for the County of Philadelphia and even
9 surrounding areas? I know that the PPF do provide,
10 from my understanding, insurance for member owners,
11 you know, officer and directors' insurance.

12 You know, unfortunately, nothing's
13 ever going to stop, you know, the lawsuits from
14 necessarily being launched. However, any time you are
15 able to have insurance and liability protection, it
16 certainly helps to protect those individuals. But I
17 just wondered if you could talk briefly about things
18 you have done, maybe working for counties, maybe
19 create some type of umbrella for any of the friends
20 groups that would be affiliated in the county. So
21 I'll be quiet so you can speak. Thank you.

22 MS. LOVELL: Yeah, unfortunately, I'm
23 not familiar with that model and not that
24 organization. So I'm happy to look into that. But to
25 my knowledge, that's not something that has been

1 considered at the city level. I know Ken Butensky's
2 on from the Law Department. He's been at this a
3 little longer than me. I don't know if he has any
4 history or if something like that has been considered
5 by the Law and or Risk Department at the city level.

6 CHAIR: So I do see that Ken is on. I
7 do see Ken on here. And we're going to try to give
8 him the floor.

9 Ken, are you there?

10 MS. MCCARTHY: I know Ken had stepped
11 away. This is Maura with Fairmount Park Conservancy.
12 I want to say that since Linde first brought this
13 matter to the attention of the City and the fellow
14 Friends Groups in 2012, I have watched every avenue
15 that has been explored over time. We used actually
16 the PALTA or the LTA, Land Trust insurance bundling as
17 the option you have looked into - Oh, Ken's back on.
18 Yeah, I'll let him talk. He's more -.

19 MR. BUTENSKY: So I didn't hear the
20 question. I heard my name mentioned, but I did not
21 hear the precise question asked. Can I ask you to
22 repeat?

23 MS. LOVELL: Yeah - yeah.

24 Could you repeat the question since
25 Ken doesn't have any knowledge about that?

1 CHAIR: Okay.

2 So basically, has the City looked into
3 maybe PPF as a model that does provide officers and
4 directors insurance from what I understand, for their
5 affiliated friend groups. You know, to help with the
6 issues of lawsuits.

7 MR. BUTENSKY: Yeah, thank you for the
8 question, I actually did pose that question to our
9 city risk manager, he's more conversant with policies
10 of insurance than I. So we did make that inquiry, and
11 essentially, the response is that it would be cost
12 prohibitive, even assuming we could get, you know,
13 this kind of an insurance.

14 So we, yeah, we did consider various
15 types of umbrella plans, you know, covered entities to
16 put money into a pot that would act like an insurance
17 company, but would not quite be an insurance company.
18 And they just did not - they were not practical and
19 just unworkable is the response I got back from our
20 City's risk management

21 MS. MCCARTHY: Ken, can I just add
22 that in addition to doing a lot of research on sort of
23 creating new insurance markets or pooled insurance
24 markets, the city has also looked at advising
25 individual organizations on risk reduction over the

1 years. They've worked with local nonprofit groups on
2 how to manage work and language around the work for
3 nonprofits to reduce risk and liability burdens.

4 And of course, each nonprofit, you
5 know, has to manage its own insurance portfolio in a
6 way that minimizes risk. I will say I think the city
7 has really turned over quite a few stones in the
8 search for a solution to this. One of the problems
9 with using the pooled risk model was that you had no
10 preexisting market and you had to create a new market.
11 And to create that market, you had to have a sort of
12 assured buying in a revenue stream, which you could -
13 you know, the entire point, of course, is that this is
14 all done on shoestring. You know, these are all
15 agencies with very little liquid funding. So it was
16 very deeply explored at points over the last ten
17 years.

18 CHAIR: I have some additional
19 questions that aren't necessarily related to this at
20 all. Does anyone else want to weigh in on this issue
21 at all?

22 REPRESENTATIVE MCCARTER: Thank you,
23 Mr. Chairman. Thank you all very much for your
24 testimony. A question that came to mind is liability
25 policies in terms of what you've been able to do in

1 the past with your insurance companies, do these cover
2 also the volunteers themselves if they were injured in
3 the carrying out of their duties as well?

4 Does anybody want to jump in on that?
5 Linde?

6 MS. LOVELL: As far as I'm aware of,
7 yes, they do also cover the volunteers themselves.

8 REPRESENTATIVE MCCARTER: And so one
9 of the reasons, again, you can't operate without that
10 coverage?

11 MS. LOVELL: Right.

12 REPRESENTATIVE MCCARTER: You would
13 not have any coverage against any injury that someone
14 might sustain as a volunteer in the park as well in
15 carrying out their duties.

16 MS. LOVELL: Right.

17 REPRESENTATIVE MCCARTER: Does anyone
18 remember what the last policy was - what the premium
19 was at that time?

20 MS. LAUFF: I don't have the exact
21 numbers.

22 REPRESENTATIVE MCCARTER: That's okay.

23 MS. LAUFF: I do know that when I
24 talked to the treasurer, I know the premiums doubled
25 from the first lawsuit to getting coverage then for

1 the last eight years. And then pretty much we were
2 told we couldn't get liability insurance. They would
3 give us other, you know, like property insurance, but
4 they would not give us any liability insurance which
5 protects the individuals.

6 REPRESENTATIVE MCCARTER: And, Ken, if
7 you could possibly jump in. I don't know in your
8 investigations into the issue the size of the policy
9 for, you know, for these friends groups in terms of
10 dollar value?

11 MR. BUTENSKY: I'm sorry. I don't
12 have that information. I don't - again, I've been
13 protected by the Pennsylvania Tort Claims Act for the
14 last 30 years. So my agency never had a need to
15 procure insurance for operations. Our city's risk
16 management unit does occasionally procure insurance
17 and I know the premiums are generally very high.
18 After 9/11 that really changed the cost of the
19 insurance and, you know, we use it sparingly.

20 MS. MCCARTHY: This is Maura again for
21 the conservancy. I can tell you that every individual
22 organization's insurance liability is different. And
23 of course, it escalates variably after an appearance
24 is made on a loss rent. The Conservancy, you know,
25 insurance went from about, I think, \$40,000 dollars a

1 year to an estimated \$160,000 dollars a year. We had
2 to lower the rate of insurance to bring it into line
3 with that 140 percent increase.

4 So sometimes, it can be quite
5 substantial. The more volunteers and the more
6 programming you do, the more variety and coverage
7 types of insurance are needed.

8 REPRESENTATIVE MCCARTER: Thank you,
9 Maura, that's very, very helpful. And again,
10 obviously, the scope of this comes out when you hear
11 that figure. You know, we are talking about hundreds
12 of thousands of dollars to be able to carry the
13 coverage that you need to be able to protect not only
14 the volunteers but, obviously, outside frivolous
15 lawsuits. Thank you very much.

16 CHAIR: Thank you. So not being from
17 the Philadelphia area, I'm interested in hearing the
18 origin of the Pennypack name origin.

19 MS. LAUFF: Pennypack actually is an
20 Indian, Lenni Lenape Indian, just as the Wissahickon
21 and many of the creeks are in this area. It's
22 original name was penepeka referring to slow-moving
23 waters, which earned the creek it's title up to
24 Frankford Avenue, which is the oldest stone arch
25 bridge they've maintained for use in the country. So

1 we have a lot of historical facts in our park system
2 and its title where there were several - like on the
3 Wissahickon, there were mills along the creek that
4 were used for milling grains. The farmers from New
5 Jersey as well as from the Philadelphia area would
6 come to the Pennypack Creek to mill their own grains.

7 CHAIR: You hear a lot of Indian names
8 up in the Northwest as well.

9 MS. LAUFF: Exactly.

10 CHAIR: But you were speaking about
11 your cleanups that you would like to be able to
12 reengage in. We've had some success up our way with
13 something called - and I'm sure you're familiar with -
14 something called PA Cleanways.

15 MS. LAUFF: Yes, we are.

16 REPRESENTATIVE MCCARTER: I know they
17 have partnered as a green PA clean up partnership with
18 I believe typically PennDOT, DEP and other affiliated
19 groups that sometimes are able to pick up the trash
20 that's been collected and able to burn some materials.
21 So just wanted to make aware that the PA cleanways is
22 maybe an avenue for you to potentially reengage.

23 MS. LAUFF: The city's always been
24 able to pick up the trash that is collected. So it's
25 taken to the streets from the park area. So the city

1 or entities will take the bags of trash. It's the
2 volunteers who need to go into the park, into the
3 brush around the trails to do the retrieval.

4 CHAIR: Potentially a PA cleanways
5 chapter would be able to help to reengage,
6 potentially. I was just putting that out there. Not
7 sure what your affiliation is as part of a land trust.
8 There may be some opportunities there for insurance.
9 Not sure about that of course.

10 So what I want to do now is just take
11 a moment. If there's absolutely anyone else that has
12 additional questions, then we will go out in
13 cyberspace. So is there anyone else that has a
14 question?

15 Janet, go ahead with your question.
16 We can hear you too, Janet. So go ahead please.

17 MS. BERNSTEIN: So I'm sorry that I
18 can't remember the name of the bill that
19 Representative Driscoll has been working on something
20 to help out Pennypack and others with unfortunate
21 situations around the state regarding the insurance
22 and liability issues. So yeah, I wanted to be able to
23 give you the number and unfortunately -

24 REPRESENTATIVE DRISCOLL: 2310.

25 MS. BERNSTEIN: 2310. Got it. So I

1 also just wanted to poke in here and say I've been
2 members of friends groups of small parks and large
3 parks in Philadelphia for many, many years. Over the
4 years friends groups in Philadelphia have been honored
5 and awarded for, you know the important work that they
6 do. But there's always been a promise of more help
7 coming, more investment by the city for the parks that
8 everyone enjoys.

9 But there's always been the promise of
10 more help coming, more investment by the City and the
11 State into the parks. And sometimes, you know, we
12 have seen some of our investment by being able to get
13 electric service to friends buildings, but in other
14 ways the city and the state have apparently come to
15 rely more on these friends groups than they have in
16 the past.

17 So work that was being done by the
18 city is now being expected to be done by the friends
19 groups at times in ways that overtax these groups.
20 Especially as the folks who started them up are
21 ageing, when the younger people come in and hear what
22 may be expected of them, they are not exactly excited
23 about that.

24 So while it is fantastic to
25 acknowledge and support friends groups, it's important

1 to face that this state and this city need to pitch in
2 a bit more because these assets to our communities are
3 so incredibly important in so many ways. All the
4 research that shows that when there is green space and
5 parks that people can be active in and participate in
6 people's physical health improves, people's mental
7 health improves, the community as a whole improves in
8 terms of every quality of life you can think of.
9 Crime goes down. Social interactions increase. Parks
10 are just incredibly important and the budgets of state
11 and municipal governments don't reflect that.

12 So just to beg, thank you for having
13 this hearing and letting me say this stuff. Thank
14 you. Signing off.

15 CHAIR: Okay.

16 So if there's anyone else who has
17 other questions?

18 Okay, we are going to start wrapping
19 up here. Mr. Driscoll's going to speak for us. And
20 he's the charter. And here he is, so thank you.

21 REPRESENTATIVE DRISCOLL: Thank you,
22 Chairman.

23 CHAIR: Thank you, Michael.

24 REPRESENTATIVE DRISCOLL: Well, that
25 testimony was moving, Linde, thank you. I know how

1 important this is to all who are in the room today and
2 all parks across the Commonwealth. Our work doesn't
3 end today. This is a continuation. And this is a
4 project that we really have to embrace. As we said
5 earlier, budgets aren't going to get better, they're
6 going to get worse. And that's why our parks are
7 going to get worse. Our parks can get better because
8 the budget will not be impacted if we empower
9 volunteers across the state to help our parks. And I
10 think House Bill 2310 is the vehicle to move that
11 forward. I will share with you that we have shared
12 the legislation with the insurance federation, and
13 we've shared it with the trial lawyers.

14 Both, in general, no objection. Both
15 are half-waiting for comments. And we've also brought
16 them language. And we want to make the best piece of
17 legislation we can so that you get to the governor's
18 desk and become the common law so we can reorganize
19 these friends groups all across the Commonwealth. And
20 make these assets of better enjoyment for all of us.

21 So I can't say enough and thank you
22 from the bottom of my heart for all the hard work you
23 do, all the volunteers across the state, just thank
24 you from the bottom of my heart. Thank you.

25 REPRESENTATIVE MCCARTER: Thank you,

1 again, Mike. You know, that's a plea from all of us
2 and a thank you that does go out to every volunteer
3 that has helped, and there are thousands across the
4 state of Pennsylvania who have done such fine work in
5 all of our parks local, state and national as well.

6 You know, there's a couple of things I
7 want to say quickly before we wrap up. My first
8 experience going back, you know, to the Friends of the
9 Wissahickon, my first experience that I remember is
10 actually pulling a trout off a line in the Wissahickon
11 fishing with my brother. I think I was probably age
12 three or four. So the Wissahickon has played a major
13 part in my life in terms of what I remember about the
14 beauty of the park, but also the sense of the
15 opportunities to get out and embrace nature.

16 That still continues today as my wife
17 and I walk consistently, not only on Forbidden Drive,
18 but up into Andorra and the urban areas in the park as
19 well. They are so critical in a sense of keeping the
20 sanity the last seven months as well. So I think, you
21 know, for every one of us, you know, we all have these
22 memories of how important these parks are.

23 And for so many children, it's the
24 neighborhood park that is so close to their home, it
25 gives them a sense of reality outside of their own

1 house in the time, again, right now that we're going
2 through, but also in the normal times as well when we
3 give them the opportunity to interface with nature.

4 Along with TTF, the Tookany/Tacony
5 Frankford watershed and working very closely with them
6 over the years and making sure that the streams are
7 clean and the streams continue to flow in a way in
8 which it preserves the sense of nature which we all
9 love.

10 So again, as we finish up here today,
11 I want to thank a number of people here. I want to
12 thank the stenographer for keeping the record of this
13 as well because that's so important going forward that
14 we have that record. Salus, again, Salus University,
15 again, for the use of their facilities.

16 So we have a task ahead of us. We
17 have a task, I think in both the Senate and the House
18 we have to continue on in order for this particular
19 issue so that we can come up with suggestions to move
20 forward to save the friends of the parks all across
21 the state, that they have the opportunity to continue
22 to do the exceptionally important work that they have
23 done for years, and years, and years, and going
24 forward. This can't come to an end. That's my
25 personal share. You know, it's something that we have

1 to take care of and should be done now. We shouldn't
2 have to wait beyond where we are.

3 So again, I want to thank our Chairman
4 for coming down here and making sure we had this
5 hearing today to give everybody a chance to share this
6 problem that we're facing here in the Philadelphia
7 region, but also we suspect it's going to continue
8 across the state of Pennsylvania. So we hope this has
9 been beneficial for all of us, I think, to hear the
10 issues we are going forward with. So, again, I think
11 we can close out the hearing. Parke, do you want to
12 do that?

13 Again, thank you all so much for being
14 here today.

15 CHAIR: So thank you to the
16 representatives who joined us and everyone else who
17 joined in online. Thank you very much for everyone's
18 interest. We really look forward to openly doing
19 everything we can through the general assembly to help
20 our friends groups be successful. Thank you. Meeting
21 adjourned.

22 * * * * *

23 HEARING CONCLUDED AT 11:33 A.M.

24 * * * * *

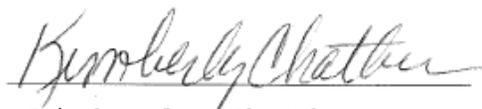
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I hereby certify, as the stenographic reporter,
that the foregoing proceedings were taken
stenographically by me, and thereafter reduced to
typewriting by me or under my direction; and that this
transcript is a true and accurate record to the best
of my ability.

Dated the 25th day of November, 2020



Kimberly Chatburn,

Court Reporter