

State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

REPRESENTATIVE ANASTASIA P. WILLIAMS, *District 9*

Chair, Committee on Labor

July 1, 2013

Honorable Mayor Taveras
25 Dorrance Street
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Davey Lopes Recreation Center

Dear Mayor Taveras:

It has come to our attention that the pool at the Davey Lopes Recreation Center, 227 Dudley St., Providence, has been closed until further notice because of safety issues. When pressing members of your administration and the City Council about how to remedy the situation, we were told that it was not worth the cost of repairs because there are not enough children utilizing the facility.

The outrage from parents and children in Upper South Providence and nearby neighborhoods has led us to believe that the notion about the pool's usage seems to be blatantly untrue. With all due respect, Mr. Mayor, it should not be necessary to remind you that recreational facilities in urban communities are often vitally important in providing needed activities that in turn deter mischievous and criminal activity. It keeps our children and your children out of trouble and puts them in proximity to other positive, engaging and productive activities.

Just in the last few weeks, this city has seen a rise in violence, specifically neighborhood gang violence. It is commonly known that the summer months are when we see increased interaction among our youth. School is out for the summer, and with warmer temperatures comes an escalation of tempers. These decisions are forcing our children to cross neighborhood lines in order to find productive recreational activities, or worse – leaving many South Providence teenagers without work for the summer at all – **the violence we are seeing in our great city will surely escalate.** We know Chief Clements and Commissioner Paré are working to decrease the deadly friction between known street gangs. But proactive thinking must be an element of the solution and employment opportunities must be a part of this equation. In addition to employment being a deterrent, these boys and girls need jobs so they can afford books and clothes for school in the fall. This, in turn, lessens the financial burden of the parent. As parents ourselves, we wanted to remind you of these facts.

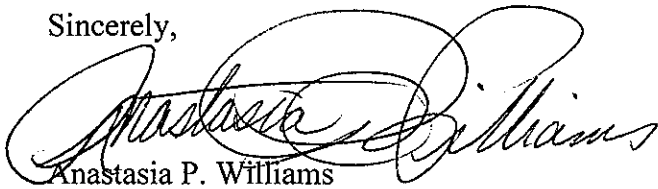
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We have heard some interesting theories as to why the pool issue has been ignored so far. Whatever the real reasons are, we are hoping that your administration would never even THINK of putting children from this or any neighborhood in jeopardy just so it can punish certain city councilors for voting against your budget or not being in step with your agenda. Putting politics aside is what we must all do at this time for the welfare and safety of our children. Therefore, we are asking that you along with all other appropriate city officials to meet as soon as possible so we can discuss a practical solution to this problem.

Some of us have approached city councilors about using Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds, but we were met with adversity there as well. We are asking you to explain to us and to the community why CDBG funds have been used to build spray parks, extend the stage at the Providence Performing Arts Center and make other city improvements, but cannot be used for Davey Lopes. If there is no funding there, surely there must be another way to make the necessary repairs, whether it is through the operating budget or some other option. It is our understanding that the Department of Public Works initially caused the damage to the pool and never returned to do the repairs, which leaves us to wonder if there was an ulterior motive there.

As far as we know, the pool is in similar condition as it was last year. The closing of the pool seems either arbitrary or politically motivated, neither of which is acceptable. We ask that in the interest of the children and the general community that you meet with members of the Rhode Island Legislative Black and Latino Caucus and city councilors so that we may clarify any misconceptions and move forward with a solution that is fair to South Side citizens of Providence. We optimistically look forward to a response from your office to schedule a meeting.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anastasia P. Williams". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Anastasia P. Williams
Chairwoman, R.I. Legislative Black & Latino Caucus

cc: Providence Delegation
Providence City Council
Regional NAACP
Rhode Island Black and Latino Caucus Members
Davey Lopes Community