

March 29, 2023

Senate Capital Investment Community

Dear Chair Pappas and Community Members,

My name is Kelly Kausel, and I am the parent of an autistic child and a resident of Apple Valley.

We know that conversation around inclusive and accessible playgrounds is not a new one. Individuals with disabilities, their families, and communities have been talking about the need for inclusive and accessible playgrounds for years. I am excited to see more and more communities understanding the need to think about inclusivity, but the work is far from done.

Recent events have shined a spotlight on the fact that when we think about inclusivity and accessibility, we need to think about **physical** barriers to participation, as well as those faced by children with **intellectual** and **developmental** disabilities. Parks that are built without fencing, or close to busy streets or water near hazards are not safe for **all** kids. We need to broaden the conversation about inclusivity and accessibility to make sure **ALL** our kids have safe places to play.

My personal experience with accessible playgrounds is worrying about elopement. Worrying about whether my child will escape the playground and run out into a busy street. Are there bodies of water nearby? If so, are they separated by fences?

What is usually a place of joy and relaxation for most families can be a place of stress and worry for families of children with disabilities.

Not long ago a child lost her life at a playground that was designed as an accessible playground because there was no fence around a holding pond nearby. This heartbreaking tragedy caused every family of a child with a disability to reconsider what it means to keep their child safe.

I am grateful that Apple Valley is committed to getting it right, and I proudly support this bill.

Sincerely,

Kelly Kausel  
Apple Valley, MN