

The Impact of the Property Tax Extension Limitation Law on Recreation Services for Individuals with Disabilities

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Since 1970, park districts and municipal recreation agencies have chosen the Special Recreation Association model to effectively and efficiently provide recreation for people with disabilities in 164 Illinois communities. Since 1991, the Special Recreation Associations in Illinois have watched and waited while the Property Tax Extension Limitation Law (PTELL) was implemented. Since 1991, while PTELL was being implemented, we have seen:

- a reduction in the number of professional staff employed by the special recreation associations
- growing waiting lists of persons with disabilities for SRA services
- dwindling fund balances in the SRAs, as many draw on reserves to meet surging demand for services, to pay bills, and to maintain programs
- increasing demands for transportation services to and from SRA programs
- staggering mandates for inclusion services, which exceed \$3,000,000 in annual costs for all the SRAs
- increasing fees and charges for services, which in some communities make the most-needed services cost-prohibitive
- a growing reliance on unpredictable soft money resources
- decreasing financial assistance to needy families, who have higher costs for the routine expenses in life such as babysitting, food, clothing, and housing
- decreases in some SRA employee benefits due to the high cost to maintain benefits
- the growth of special recreation associations has stopped, with only 4 communities joining an SRA since 1991, while 160 joined in the two decades prior to the Tax Cap

The Special Recreation Association model relies on sharing control and resources, and maximizing programs by eliminating duplication within the partner park districts and municipalities. Because of the tax cap, these benefits are harder to realize. The model itself is in jeopardy and without intervention by the General Assembly, can not effectively serve the needs of the growing number of Illinois adults and children with disabilities. The unfunded mandates of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) have reduced the capacity of the Special Recreation Associations to provide the "core" services relied upon by people and families with disabilities.

What factors are adversely affecting the Special Recreation Associations?

- The implementation of federal unfunded mandates required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is causing demand for capital and program dollars that are unavailable under the PTELL.
- The phenomenal growth of inclusion opportunities for people with disabilities included in public parks and recreation services in the least restrictive settings as stipulated by Olmstead, the ADA, and other state and federal regulations.
- The impacts of the PTELL occurring at the same time when the demands for increased services have never been greater.
- The vast transition, from state-operated, residential facilities for people with disabilities, to local, community-based services, has created the greatest demand for services since the inception of Special Recreation Associations in 1970.
- The advances in medical technology save lives at both the birth and aging end of the spectrum, resulting in more people with disabilities living in the community than ever before.
- The State of Illinois budget crunch has eliminated the ability of the State to provide program grants to local agencies like SRAs that would help us meet emerging needs.
- The growing number of transition-aged school aged youth with disabilities (18 to 23) are straining the system by asking both school districts and park districts to develop programs for young adults in this group.

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