

Written by Sunny

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State Senator Jeff Hayden (DFL-Minneapolis) and State Representative Karen Clark (DFL-Minneapolis) are working with Governor Mark Dayton and bipartisan legislative leadership to include funding in this year's bonding bill for the Phillips Community Center pool renovation project. The \$2.1 million request did not make it into last year's bill, but Hayden, Clark, and pool advocate Minneapolis Swims (www.mplsswims.org) hope that bipartisan support for the bill will help it to be reconsidered.

The city of Minneapolis has only one public indoor pool, which currently sits empty and unused at the Phillips Community Center. In need of extensive renovations, the pool could provide life-saving learn-to-swim programs for more than 15,000 neighborhood children and their parents. The renovation would include improving the existing pool (built in 1973), mechanical equipment, pool deck, and locker rooms. Enhancements to the pool area would include a secondary multi-purpose warm-water pool for lessons and water therapy, which would help to raise revenue to support ongoing operations.

"Minnesota is the 'Land of 10,000 Lakes' and yet we're not equipping our citizens to safely enjoy the water activities this state offers. Learning to swim is a critical life-skill in our state and thousands of economically-disadvantaged and racially-diverse children in this city are denied this opportunity," said Hayden. "There are huge disparities in swimming and drowning rates in the state of Minnesota. From 2000-2005, we had the highest drowning rate in the nation among blacks and the third highest among Native Americans. These statistics must change."

"I have been fighting for this project for over a year," said Clark. "Swimming not only saves lives, but it can also combat the obesity epidemic and provide a challenging, inspiring environment to help our children excel. We must make swimming more accessible to everyone in our city and stop the disparity. This is an important civil rights issue."

Minneapolis Swims' Executive Director Hannah Lieder, who was named "9th Ward Leader of the Year" by Councilmember Gary Schiff for her effort to save the pool, added, "on the same day our funding got cut from the state bonding bill last year, a 17-year-old African-American boy drowned in a Minneapolis lake. This is the kind of tragedy we can prevent with swimming lessons and water safety curriculum. Saving the Phillips Community Center pool could change the lives of so many people in this neighborhood."

The bills, numbered SF0214 and HF0307, respectively, await hearings in the Senate and House Capital Investment Committees. Hayden and Senator Linda Higgins, DFL-Minneapolis, authored the Senate bill, while Clark, Representative Larry Howes, R-Walker, Representative Kim Norton, DFL-Rochester, and House Minority Leader, Representative Paul Thissen, DFL-Minneapolis, authored the House version.