



The Maryland-National Capital
Park and Planning Commission



*****MEDIA RELEASE*****

ACLU of Maryland, Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission Announce Agreement Protecting Free Speech Rights

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The American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland and the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) announced today that M-NCPPC has decided to suspend enforcement of park regulations that the ACLU said inappropriately restricted First Amendment rights. M-NCPPC quickly responded to a letter sent October 12 by the ACLU of Maryland on behalf of Robin Ficker, a candidate for the Montgomery County Council, who was told that he could not have a volunteer carry a campaign sign while Mr. Ficker spoke with potential voters gathered at the Germantown Regional Park for a fireworks display.

In addition to suspending the regulations restricting individual and small groups of speakers, the M-NCPPC and ACLU have agreed to work together to consider revisions to the agency's regulations that protect the role that public parks play in providing a venue for free public discussion of political issues.

"The M-NCPPC's response to our concerns has been exemplary," said David Rocah, Staff Attorney for the ACLU of Maryland. "The officials recognized that the regulations deserve improvement and are working quickly to address our concerns. I wish that all public officials we deal with about important constitutional issues were as conscientious and responsive."

The M-NCPPC, which operates over 53,000 acres of parkland in Montgomery and Prince George's counties, has agreed to suspend enforcement of regulations that 1) require a permit for the solicitation of petition signatures outside of any park structure or building, 2) require a permit to conduct surveys, interviews or polls outside of any park structure or building for any non-commercial purpose, and 3) require a permit to carry signs or picketing by 25 or less individuals outside of any park structure or building.

"Understanding the important role parks play in facilitating community debate and the dissemination of ideas and free speech, no one has a more vested interest than the Commission in ensuring free access to the parks," said Samuel J. Parker, Jr., M-NCPPC Chairman. "We welcome the opportunity to partner with the ACLU to continue to examine our

policies, procedures, methods and means to ensure full compliance with the constitutional principles of free speech.”

Go online to read the M-NCPPC’s interim agreement:

http://www.mncppc.org/Commission_Home.html or http://www.aclu-md.org/aPress/Press2009/MNCPPC_response.pdf

Go online to read the ACLU of Maryland original letter to M-NCPPC:

http://www.aclu-md.org/aPress/Press2009/LTR_MNCPPC.pdf

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