

## So That Every Voice Can Be Heard

8 months ago, at the socially distanced MVRHS graduation ceremony, speeches were given on stage by faculty, students and administration about the commitment of our schools and island community, to Social Justice, Racial Justice and Environmental Justice.

In the context of these deliberations by the MV Commission about the plastic field proposed by the MV school committee, I want to bring attention to the commitment to environmental justice that was made on that graduation stage by our school's representatives.

Let me first define environmental justice.

Robert Bullard, father of environmental justice says:

Environmental justice embraces the principle that all people and communities have a right to equal protection and equal enforcement of environmental laws and regulations.

In order to have equal protection and equal enforcement of environmental laws and regulations for all people in our community, it would mean that all people in our community are represented, that they have a voice, a seat at the table, and access to these processes.

A commitment to environmental justice is to look for and find those who would be hardest hit by the climate risks, the water contamination risks, the disposal risks, and the direct and indirect financial costs of installation, maintenance, repair and replacement of a plastic playing field and make sure those folks have a full and equal voice in the decision making. A commitment to environmental justice asks the question: Have we sought out our most vulnerable communities and insured that they have equal access to resources and information in regard to these deliberations and are they represented in the processes of deciding regulations about the environmental safety of their community?

In other words, are our most vulnerable communities represented in the MV Commission and the MV School Committee?

A commitment to Environmental Justice is to say that until the make up of the school committee and the MV Commission mirrors our community, we cannot be sure that either the proposal for the project or decisions we are making about the project are fair, equitable and just for everyone.

A commitment to Environmental Justice asks:

Do we have Black and Brown folks on the school committee and on the commission?

Do we have members of the Wampanoag tribe on the school committee and the commission?

Do we have Brazilian folks on the school committee and the commission?

Do we have LGBTQIA folks on the school committee and the commission?

Do we have minimum/hourly wage workers and those on fixed incomes on the school committee and the commission?

Do we have ESL folks on the school committee and the commission?

Do we have persons with disabilities on the school committee and the commission?

Do we have young people, elementary school, middle school, high school, and young adults on the school committee and the commission?

The answers to these questions are important because those not represented are made invisible.

The so called "invisible communities" are the ones who bear the brunt of decisions but are not actively and deliberately invited to take part in the making of the decisions. There are many

aspects of the proposed plastic field that are problematic, particularly to those in the invisible communities. The risk the plastic fields pose to our drinking water is the most fundamental in terms of environmental injustice. If our water becomes contaminated by pfas, as it has in the wells of many houses south of the airport, how will our minimum/hourly wage earners and those on fixed incomes such as retirees and the elderly, afford to buy water? Do we have plans in place to pay for purified water in perpetuity for those who cannot afford bottled water or expensive water purification systems? What recourse is available to mothers when the water they have been ingesting during pregnancy is found to be compromised by chemicals that are harmful to the fetus? What about families who cannot afford medical care on an island contaminated with toxic chemicals? The voices and concerns of these communities and many others, because they are not represented have been rendered silent and invisible.

In light of the events of this past year and the protests for racial and social justice that erupted all over the planet and here on MV, I am disappointed that the school committee and the commission have not on their own, become representative of the many communities on the island which they serve. The school committee and the commission are comprised almost entirely of well-off white people.

In the name of justice, equity and fairness, I call into question the legitimacy of these deliberations based on the lack of representation of key communities of our island. In the name of environmental justice, I call on the members of the school committee, administration, and faculty to keep the promise they made on that stage eight months ago, to racial, social and environmental justice. If we want to do something for the kids, let's start with equity, justice, inclusion and fairness so that every voice can be heard.

Thank you.