



Terry Takahashi
AYSO Region 13
Regional Commissioner
711 W Woodbury Rd. Unit E
Altadena, CA 91001

November 15, 2024

The City of La Cañada Flintridge
One Civic Center Drive
La Cañada Flintridge, CA 91011

To the Honorable Members of the City Council,

My name is Terry Takahashi, and I serve as the volunteer Regional Commissioner of AYSO Region 13. In this role, I have the privilege of representing a dedicated group of families who coach, referee, organize, and most importantly, play soccer within the Pasadena and La Cañada communities.

AYSO Region 13 has been a partner with the City of La Cañada for over 50 years, and we are deeply grateful for the City's ongoing support of our program. Access to your fields has been crucial and enables us to provide soccer opportunities for local youth. Over the years, your support has enabled many La Cañada children to participate in our program and develop both on and off the field. Currently, over 650 players from La Cañada register for Region 13 programs throughout the year.

At the October 9, 2024 meeting of the City of La Cañada Flintridge Parks and Recreation Commission, a proposal was discussed that would restrict access to certain fields, namely the Varsity, JV, and Oak Grove fields at La Cañada High to players aged 10 and younger for sports other than baseball or softball. The stated goal of this change is to protect the field, with the implication that non-baseball/softball groups (i.e., soccer) are causing damage to the field.

AYSO Region 13 strongly advocates that the City Council reject this proposal. There are a number of reasons why this proposal is bad for the children and families of La Cañada.

First, this change has the potential to drastically change Region 13's program. One in three of our teams in the Fall season practice on LCHS fields. As such, this age limitation would have an immense negative impact on our program. The Varsity and JV outfields, along with Oak Grove field, are the only fields in La Cañada equipped with lighting. Restricting these fields to younger players would prevent Region 13's older players from accessing any La Cañada fields with lights. This is particularly problematic for players aged 12 and older, who often play after 7:30 PM when lighting is necessary, even during the summer months.

If this change is implemented, Region 13 would likely face a shortage of practice space for our current teams, which could result in more limited access to our program, and/or La Cañada families needing to travel further for practice on alternate fields in Pasadena. Moreover, AYSO faces similar challenges in securing fields in Pasadena, and without continued support from both La Cañada and Pasadena, it will be difficult for our program to function as it currently does.

Winter and Spring programs in Region 13 are now run solely on Pasadena fields – no La Cañada fields are currently permitted to AYSO during these periods. La Cañada players who participate in our programs are thus supported by Pasadena and La Cañada families already bear the burden of further travel. This change would mean that for our 11 and older players, Pasadena must support these La Cañada families yearlong.

Second, the reason for this change, as given by the Parks and Recreation Commission, is that the quality issues at these fields stem from older soccer players' use. Region 13 believes the primary issue is the ongoing gopher problem. Gophers destabilize the ground, making it unsafe and unplayable for soccer and other sports, and causing severe damage to the field. As a secondary result, areas that are free from gopher damage end up being overused, leading to greater wear and tear. In contrast, fields like FIS Lower and certain Pasadena locations, which do not suffer from gopher infestations, experience more even wear, with only the goal areas showing signs of heavy use.

This reasoning also ignores the documented public record attributing poor field quality to gophers at the fields. At the September 14, 2022 of the Parks and Recreation Commission, many residents, including Commissioner Kozakar's wife, complained about the poor quality of the fields due to gophers. The agenda for the October 12, 2022 Parks and Recreation Commission meeting (Agenda Item 4) notes that *"due to the pool project, the gopher activity increased exponentially in the JV/Varsity fields"* and that *"Due to these conditions... that the fields would require rebuilding."* At the September 28, 2023 Joint Use Committee Meeting, it was noted that the gophers were still an issue at that time.

When AYSO teams took to these fields in August 2024, they were already in poor condition due to the gophers. Thus, it is unfair, inaccurate, and a distortion of the public record to attribute the damage to these fields to non-baseball/softball players when the gopher issue has, and still remains, a major problem. As such, we do not believe that restricting older players from these fields will significantly improve their condition.

Third, this change unfairly penalizes non-baseball/softball sports while potentially enriching baseball and softball. If this change occurs, these fields will potentially be freed up for more use by baseball and softball. We also note that while it is unrealistic to expect there to be no conflicts of interest, several Commissioners of the Parks and Recreation Commission have ties to the La Cañada Baseball and Softball Association. Proposing a change to enrich baseball and softball without providing compensatory changes for other sports is an inequitable change. Without providing alternate field options for other sports, these multipurpose fields should remain multipurpose for all players from all sports.

As the JV and Varsity fields are solely used for baseball, which is a boys' sport, this change will also result in penalizing girls' sports. Allowing baseball to use these fields would increase the resources provided to boys' sports while decreasing the resources available to girls' sports. This once again results in an inequitable change.

Lastly, maintaining the quality of La Cañada fields is a priority for Region 13. AYSO is committed to being a responsible partner and maintaining our long-standing partnership with the City. We are eager to explore collaborative solutions to ensure that the fields remain in good condition. For example, we are open to finding ways to use other underutilized fields and reduce the burden on LCHS fields.

AYSO has also donated money for the improvement, maintenance, and repair of La Cañada fields over the years. These are projects that we gladly contribute to as fields are vital to our program.

One proposed change would start charging community groups, such as AYSO, for field usage instead of the current donation model. Region 13 would support such a change provided that the fees are reasonable, as these costs would be passed on to our families and Region 13 tries to keep our fees as low as possible as to enable many more families to play soccer. We would also gladly support these field charges if they are used to better maintain and improve the conditions of fields. These fees should also apply to all users of the fields; no one organization or organizations should be given preferential treatment. If we users are all charged equally according to our usage, that would be a fair and equitable way of spreading the responsibility and requisite support across all user groups.

We believe that sports are a critical component that contributes to kids' development. Sports teach skills and lessons that are not only specific to a particular sport, but ones that serve our kids throughout their lives: values such as teamwork, hard work, fair play, how to win, how to lose, and so much more. While we at Region 13 choose soccer as our sport, we also recognize that it's vital that kids should play other sports too. We thus believe that any change to limit access to LCHS fields is antithetical to that goal and is a disservice to our kids.

In summary, we respectfully urge the City Council to reject the proposed age restrictions on LCHS fields. We believe this policy would be ineffective in preserving field quality and would significantly hinder Region 13's ability to provide youth soccer opportunities for La Cañada residents.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Terry Takahashi', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Terry Takahashi
Regional Commissioner, AYSO Region 13