Written Testimony Submitted for the Record to the
Maryland House of Delegates
Appropriations Committee

Use of Public Funds – Playground and Athletic Field Surfaces – Authorizations, Preferences, and Prohibitions (Safe and Healthy Fields Act) (HB 1098)

March 5, 2020

SUPPORT

Maryland PTA is the state’s oldest and largest child advocacy organization that serves as a powerful voice for all children, a relevant resource for families, schools and communities and a strong advocate for public education. We represent thousands of volunteer members in 900 public schools and we are comprised of families, students, teachers, administrators, and business as well as community leaders devoted to the educational success of children and family engagement in Maryland. For nearly 105 years, our mission has been to make every child’s potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children.

Maryland PTA submits this testimony in support of the Safe and Healthy Fields Act (“HB 1098”). This bill would authorize funds under Program Open Space to be used for the maintenance and upkeep of grass athletic fields and drainage systems; establish a preference for the use of natural surface materials to construct playgrounds or athletic fields; and, prohibit the use of State funds to finance any part of a project to build a new or replace an existing playground or athletic field with a synthetic surface.

Maryland’s children are exposed to unnecessary toxins on artificial surfaces. Synthetic turf’s plastic carpets contain toxic chemicals such as heavy metals, phthalates, UV inhibitors, colorants, and flame retardants and the highly toxic class of PFAS “non-stick” chemicals1. These plastic carpets typically are topped with 30,000 to 50,000 pulverized used tires’ worth of infill, referred to as “tire crumb.” This tire crumb contains additional toxic substances, including heavy metals like lead and mercury, benzothiazoles, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, carbon black, and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) such as benzene. Many of these substances are known as carcinogens, neurotoxins, or endocrine disruptors. The tire crumb and plastic debris escapes the surface of synthetic turf fields to contaminate air, water, and soil.

Student athletes are also impacted by the artificial surface and infills that are not tire based. One infill that has been used is called Zeolite, which is pulverized volcanic rock. Athletes have reported that these fields are more slippery than natural turf, changing the way they play. When they fall, they are left with documented friction “burns” and lacerations.2

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1 Lerner, S. https://theintercept.com/2019/10/08/pfas-chemicals-artificial-turf-soccer/
2 https://theblackandwhite.net/66448/opinion/mcps-stop-building-more-turf-fields-like-ours/
Other problems that have come up with artificial turf fields and playground surfaces are heat spikes on warm, sunny days, as well as environmental impacts from the use and disposal of the surface once it is replaced.

Maryland PTA understands the need for new fields and play areas, especially when the current natural surface has failed and more children need outdoor activity. We support using funds from Open Space to install new, state-of-the-art fields and drainage systems and for maintenance. Since the overall costs of natural grass has been showed to be less than artificial turf, the costs should not be prohibitive over time.\(^3\) The risk to children’s health is not worth the convenience of installing artificial surfaces.

Maryland PTA recommends a favorable report on HB1098.

Respectfully Submitted,

*Edna Harvin Battle*

Dr. Edna Harvin Battle
President

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\(^3\) [https://www.turi.org/TURI_Publications/TURI_Chemical_Fact_Sheets/Artificial_Turf_Fact_Sheet2](https://www.turi.org/TURI_Publications/TURI_Chemical_Fact_Sheets/Artificial_Turf_Fact_Sheet2)