

House Bill 1098

Use of Public Funds - Playground and Athletic Field Surfaces **Authorizations, Preferences, and Prohibitions** *(Safe and Healthy Field Act)*

Position: **Letter of Opposition**

Date: March 3, 2020

From: Greg Pizzuto, Executive Director
Visit Harford

Visit Harford Inc. has the following concern regarding HB 1098.

Program Open Space (POS) funds, in many jurisdictions, are the sole funding source for land acquisition, and the construction of playgrounds, sports fields and courts, pathways and other recreational amenities. Most importantly, in every jurisdiction, these funds supplement capital budgets on some level to meet the local demands for services.

By establishing a preference to provide State funds to only those jurisdictions who are able to use and afford state-of-the-art natural surface materials to build a new or replace an existing playground or athletic field surface, is very injurious to those smaller jurisdictions who cannot afford the natural materials and who rely on POS money as their monetary foundation when developing their budget. This preference will set things back from a maintenance perspective as well and will also take away the ability for jurisdictions to be flexible in their spending. In addition, this will result in the need to substantially increase funding allocations to cover the rising costs of state-of-the-art natural surface materials afforded by the new technology.

Sports tourism and economic benefit for jurisdictions will also be affected. Without having the flexibility of POS funds to expand and maintain synthetic turf athletic fields, the amount of play on a field and revenue that can be generated will greatly affect Harford County and other MD jurisdictions.

Harford County hosts over 100 outside groups annually including national tournaments for soccer, lacrosse, youth baseball and softball. All events induce spending in dining establishments, retail, gasoline, and services. Larger regional and national events fill our hotels as well as surrounding areas' hotels. Likewise, when surrounding jurisdictions host large events the spending overflows into Harford County. According to the Maryland Sports Commission, 3,500 sporting events over 10 years brought 1.7 billion dollars in directing spending on Maryland's economy. A recent sports tourism economic impact exercise by Crossroads Consulting suggests sports tourism in Harford County yields an economic impact of \$49 million per year. Our hope is to grow our inventory of available facilities to accommodate more events. Increased costs to our facility stewards will have an adverse effect and ultimately put Harford County and like jurisdictions at a competitive disadvantage in attracting outside groups.

Allowing state and local POS allocations to be used for maintenance and upkeep of only natural grass fields is not sustainable, especially during a rainy season and for jurisdictions with high demand for more fields and more use. My personal experience with tournament planners is that they prefer our synthetic surfaces as it provides consistency and is resilient to weather conditions and lessens the need for canceling an event for rain.

Additionally, by eliminating rubber safety surfacing for playgrounds, the ease of children with disabilities accessing playgrounds and other park amenities will be affected. Rubber safety surfacing provides a consistent surface for falls.

Please consider the consequences of this proposed legislation will have.

Respectfully submitted,


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