

JARED SOLOMON  
Legislative District 18  
Montgomery County

Appropriations Committee  
Subcommittees

Education and Economic Development  
Oversight Committee on Personnel



The Maryland House of Delegates  
6 Bladen Street, Room 222  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
301-858-3130 · 410-841-3130  
800-492-7122 Ext. 3130  
Fax 301-858-3233 · 410-841-3233  
Jared.Solomon@house.state.md.us

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Favorable Testimony – HB 1098 Safe & Healthy Fields Act**  
**House Appropriations Committee**  
**March 5, 2020**

Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Gaines, Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to present today on my legislation HB 1098, which restricts the use of state funds for the construction and maintenance of synthetic surfaces (fields and playgrounds) and instead *prioritizes and funds state-of-the-art* grass and natural materials to build playgrounds and fields. Many of you are probably familiar with this bill, as it is identical to legislation I introduced last year.

HB 1098 authorizes funding under Program Open Space for the lifetime costs for maintenance and upkeep of grass athletic fields and drainage systems. Much progress has been made in the cost, quality, and durability of natural grass. The current state-of-the-art of grass sports fields limit or eliminate chemical inputs while becoming more durable and playable in most conditions. Unlike the environmental harms of synthetic turf, natural grass surfaces have many benefits – they filter water, oxygenate the air and provide safe, soft, practical, sustainable, and healthy surfaces for players.

A growing body of research highlights the danger posed by synthetic surfaces to public health and the environment. Today’s panel will focus on the heat concerns, safety issues, environment impact, cost, and economic impact of synthetic turf.

**Why is Synthetic Turf Unsafe?**

- Plastic synthetic turf is a urethane-backed carpet of colored plastic “blades” on top of a foundation of rocks with soil removed. The plastic contains toxic chemicals such as heavy metals, phthalates, UV inhibitors, colorants, and flame retardants. These chemicals are known to be toxic to children at any level. Industry experts have acknowledged that the dangerous heavy metal, lead, is found in dust from the fields. As we all know, there is no safe level of lead for children, according to the CDC and American Academy of Pediatrics.
- In addition to chemical exposure, safety is a constant concern including hazardous overheating, unexpected failure of infill to cushion falls, sanitation problems, and injuries including increased skin abrasions and more frequent joint injury to knees and ankles.

- **Athletes in Division II and III competitions experienced a 63% higher ACL injury rates on artificial turf than on natural grass.**
- **Division II and Division III athletes are 3 times more likely (3.13) to have PCL (Post Cruciate Ligament) injuries on artificial turf.**
- **There is a 27% higher injury rate to lower body on synthetic turf vs. natural grass.**
- Sanitary issues have been documented including increased instances of MRSA among NFL players and other athletes from turf burns. With regards to overheating, surface temperatures on the synthetic turf field used by Jordan McNair and his teammates, when later recorded, reached as high as 150 degrees and these fields are often 60 degrees higher than the air temperature.

### **What is the True Cost Comparison of Synthetic Turf vs. Grass Turf?**

- According to *Field Turf* and the fiscal note, an artificial turf field can range in cost from \$800,000 to \$1.5 million and the warranty lasts for 8 years, while the field typically lasts 10 years. Replacing the field costs approximately \$500,000-\$600,000 with an annual maintenance of up to \$20,000.
- A grass field on the other hand, costs between \$150,000-\$500,000 to install and \$20,000-25,000 annually for maintenance. There is a potential savings of \$500,000 over 10 years if a school installs and properly maintains a grass field.
- **A grass field over 16 years costs between \$33,522-\$49,318. A turf field costs approximately \$65,849-\$109,013.**
- In analyzing the costs of artificial vs. natural grass systems, it is important to consider full life-cycle costs, including installation, maintenance, and disposal/replacement.

### **Economic Impact of Supporting Our Maryland Businesses**

- By prioritizing and funding natural grass turf we have a unique opportunity to grow the natural grass industry in Maryland. Our state has some of the most highly qualified people and companies in turf grass management available, but current law encourages taxpayers to support a multinational European synthetic turf company – one of the only sources of synthetic turf fields in the state. We should support our local industry and workforce and keep jobs here in Maryland.

HB 1098 bill will encourage the installation of sustainable, healthy, cost effective, and durable natural surfaces. The largest school district in Maryland, the Montgomery County Public School System voted to support this bill.

**Let's make smart investments in our children's health and wellbeing. I urge a favorable report and thank you for your consideration.**