

Position: SUPPORT

Hearing Date: March 5, 2020. 1 PM

Regarding: MD HB1098

I submit this testimony in support of MD HB1098, which addresses state investments in synthetic surfaces which imperil fiscal health, child health and the environment, especially when compared with natural surfaces which done right are beneficial to human and environmental health, are cost effective, durable and accessible.

I am a lifelong Marylander and a landscape contractor specializing in natural grass athletic fields. My family's small multi-generational company has been installing and maintaining athletic fields in Maryland, the District, and Virginia since the early 1980s. We've installed grass at The White House, the field at Jack Kent Cook Stadium (FedEx), Prince Georges Stadium, and many more locations. We have had numerous athletic field maintenance contracts in the DC area.

It has been my experience that insufficient annual funding has been allocated for most basic maintenance beyond mowing. As a result, the natural athletic fields frequently become damaged or worn, leading coaches and athletic directors looking a low maintenance alternatives.

The basic argument of artificial turf proponents is that financially artificial fields make sense based on a formula they've created to calculate Dollars spent / hour of field use compared to natural turf fields.

There are two fundamental flaws in this comparison.

The first is inflated natural turf field maintenance budgets \$29,000 - \$50,000/year. If that were actually being spent. The existing natural field would be immaculate. The reality is in Maryland most high school fields get budget between \$6000 and \$10,000 per year which covers little more than just mowing. Shortfalls are made up by boosters club fundraising.

The second is inaccuracy is the assertion that artificial fields are available for use at all times. The fact is they are too hot to safely use most summer days from 11-4.

Financial considerations -

According to Field Turf, conversion of a typical HS field to artificial turf is about \$750,000 (FieldTurf's website).

Evidence suggests it's actually significantly more. In 2017 Montgomery County paid FieldTurf \$4.9 million for just three new fields at Einstein, Whitman and West.

They warranty the field for 8 years. The estimated replacement costs after 8-10 years is \$374,400 - \$449,280 (Sports Turf Managers Association).

MCPS projects an eight to 10-year life cycle for the new playing fields with replacement costs of \$500,000 to \$600,000, and annual maintenance of less than \$10,000 annually per field.(Washington Post).

Sidwell Friends school in the District just paid \$765,000 to replace theirs after 10 years.

After 10 years, with an very conservative estimated minimum initial costs of \$750,000 and \$10,000 annual maintenance, \$850,000 will have been spent for an average of \$85,000 and a new field is required.

At this point another \$374,400-\$765,000 is required to replace the now worn out field.

If we instead a very high estimate \$150,000 to convert an existing field to Bermuda grass or Bluegrass, and provide \$50,000 annually for maintenance, at the end of 10 years \$650,000 will have been spent. Additionally, no new field would be required.

Using natural turf potentially saved around \$200,000 plus the \$500,000 replacement costs at year 10. This is using low estimates for artificial fields and high estimates for natural turf.

The numbers do not support the artificial turf model. With a sufficient annual maintenance budget of \$50,000 (or much more) after initial investment, the comparative savings grow larger every 10 years. Whereas with an artificial turf field, the buyer is locked in an expensive cycle that never get less expensive.

Land Use and Overburdened fields

Alternatively, money that would be used to build artificial fields could be used to buy more land for natural fields where practical in non-urban areas. This is would be a highly effective strategy to mitigate the ware by having more fields to share the burden of multiple teams, seasons, and activities. This may not be practical in urban locations. However, in the vast majority of Maryland's schools in suburban and rural communities it would be the best solution. When each team has its own field, and there are multiple practice fields available, the fields can rest more frequently and recover from wear will little additional input of material or effort. This requires much reduced annual investment and is retained as an asset of the state. Existing examples of this can be found around the state.

Another alternative use of large initial capital investments could be used to endow athletic fields much like some parks. The investments could be used to fund a reasonable sustainable budgets for their maintenance.

Durability

Artificial fields are not indestructible. Cases of arson, vandalism with motorized vehicles, and even paint have cost tens of thousands of dollars to repair. Immediate repairs are required because in most cases the fields are unusable until the repairs are made. This is a far less likely scenario for natural fields. Unexpected emergency repair expenses are seldom factored into long term or maintenance costs.

Supporting Maryland Businesses

I believe this is arguably the most important consideration. The Maryland natural turf grass industry is a thriving local asset employing thousands of Marylanders. The University of Maryland's Turfgrass Extension programs are world renown. With some of the most highly educated and best qualified people and companies in turf grass management available in our state, it seems counter to our state's interest to send millions of our state and local tax dollars to out of state or foreign owned companies. FieldTurf is a Canadian subsidiary of a French corporation that hires lobbyist to promote their interests at our expense. We should be keeping our money in Maryland and keeping more Marylanders working. We should be supporting our local industry and workforce while continuing to utilize the many innovations in natural grass sciences developed locally.

It should also be noted the obvious advantage of natural grass in carbon recovery. We can promote Maryland businesses while being part of a solution to a global problem. By following a course consistent with Maryland's other progressive environmental policies, we can take this opportunity set an example of best practices for other states.