

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

Appropriations Committee – March 5,
2020
Emily Clancy
Support

Dear Chair MacIntosh, Vice-Chair Jackson and members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Emily Clancy, and I would like to thank you for the opportunity to express my support for HB1098 and ask each of you for your support of the bill. My objective today is to bring awareness, so what happened to my sons, Ryan and Patrick as well as our family will never ever happen to another person or family again.

On July 21, 2017 former MHS head soccer coach, Stuart Pierson conducted a MHS sponsored “out of season” official practice on the synthetic turf field from 8:00-10:00 a.m. which was apparently authorized by MHS athletic director, Matthew Pearman.

July 21st was the second day in a row of a National Weather Service Heat Advisory. That early morning it was full sun, oppressive heat and humidity. The approximately eleven boys who attended never left the synthetic turf for over two hours. Water breaks consisted of running to get the water (that the boys provided for themselves) sitting in full sun on the turf next to the track. The water became hot. No cooler of ice water was next to the field which is against the rules, and the boys were never offered the ice and water locked in the

concession room even when some boys were out of water. No shade breaks or ice towels were provided.

By rule, the maximum heat index is 104 degrees for an outdoor practice with restrictions. According to the VHSL guideline in place on July 21st, by 9:00am the minimum heat index on the synthetic turf field in full sun was 122 degrees Fahrenheit and by 10:00, it was a minimum of 127 degrees. My sons left the turf field around 10:15 after finishing a rigorous practice without restrictions or precautions, cleaned up the coach's equipment before driving straight home.

The guideline ignored was the OSAA Heat Index Calculator with a clear warning which states: **Beware of Artificial Surfaces.** Generally, synthetic turf can be 35 to 55 degrees hotter than natural grass. Consider the hotter temperatures on synthetic surfaces.

Research from the Penn State Center for Sports Surface Research proves the surface temperature of a synthetic turf field may be **as much as 50 to 60 degrees Fahrenheit higher and the ambient air temperature, up to as much as 160 degrees Fahrenheit, and the air temperature on a synthetic turf field can be substantially higher** than on a grass field under the same conditions.

Ryan and Patrick arrived home feeling sick, but Patrick could not walk and barely crawled up the stairs. He had a severe headache, severe nausea, chills, difficulty breathing, not sweating, and only wanted to lay down on the cold wood floor. He was over heated and in a lot of trouble. His fingers and toes began turning blue. We moved him to a cool shower, but he was having trouble standing, fell to the floor and began throwing up.

I moved him to the bathtub, because I knew we needed to submerge his torso and cool his core. While in the tub, he threw up several more times. He increasingly had trouble breathing and his toes and fingers continued to turn blue. It took two of us to carry him to the car. He had no idea what was going on. We drove to Martha Jefferson Emergency. When we arrived, his hands and feet had turned completely blue. He was immediately taken back and the vital signs monitor had to be attached to his head, because his fingers were too cold and

clammy to get a reading which set off the alarm. Several hours, IV bags, blood tests and urine tests later, we left the hospital. Thank goodness, my son lived! What if he died? What if I was not home?

I am a USSF licensed soccer coach with ten years of coaching experience. I was lucky I had training to recognize and treat my son for heat stroke. In the past, I also experienced the brutal synthetic turf temperatures but never like what my sons experienced that day. They were asked to play in conditions a dog owner would have been arrested for doing.

I have personally felt ill after coaching games and tournaments played on synthetic turf fields. There were times that the field was so hot my feet were burning. There were many times a plea went out to parents to set up a canopy for shade only to be told by facility management that tents could not be used because the poles could damage the synthetic surface. **The surface safety was more important than the player's safety. This is not a problem on natural grass.**

At times, games had to be altered and cut short due to the heat from the field. On my own, I made the decision to pull the team off the synthetic turf and forgo warmups which is not ideal but the heat risk was too great. We sat under the bleachers away from the turf to try to stay cool. This was on a day that temperatures were considered normal and not extreme like on July 21, 2017.

There is a narrative out there that athletes should self-regulate and know when to stop, but this is NOT the nature of an athlete and the coach/player relationship. Coaches want their players to give it their best effort and push through a wall to reach the next level. Athletes want to do just that. Athletes want to make the team, be on the starting line-up, and impress their coaches, teammates, and even parents. **It is our responsibility to provide a safe environment for that to happen. Synthetic turf does not provide a safe environment for athletes or even children just messing around for fun.**

Let's be clear. Playing sports always carries a risk of injury or accident like a broken ankle or concussion, BUT heat exhaustion and heat stroke are non-accidental and 100% preventable. After the incident, the coach e-mailed me

saying that my son did not bring enough water. The athletic director “investigated” and determined that practice was within guidelines and conditions were not considered adverse. This scares me! It could happen again! People have died from complications of exertional heat stroke after participating in events on synthetic turf, my son was almost part of that grim fact, and that’s why I am here.

Times have changed from the days of playing on grass and standing under the trees by the field. Artificial turf fields become heat islands, and we need to take action. On July 21, 2017, there were rules/guidelines in place warning about the dangers of turf heat. The administration and coach chose to have the practice anyway.

What happens when those rules/guidelines/dangers are ignored by the adults in charge? What happens if there is a warning sign posted on the artificial turf fields, but kids want to play anyway? Who is responsible? Kids should be able to play and not worry they may get sent to the hospital or worse for wanting to have fun on a sunny day.

Rules and policy are only good if they are followed and enforced. Is it responsible to install artificial surfaces that need such strict rules and enforcement? Who is responsible for the enforcement? Who is responsible when something goes horribly wrong?

My family and I thank you for considering all of the information and questions I have put forth today. Many things went wrong on July 21, 2017. The soccer practice Ryan and Patrick participated in never should have taken place in those brutal conditions. As a parent, I trusted the rules and precautions would have been followed which included not holding a two hour practice on a surface that heated up like a stovetop.

Please consider supporting HB1098. To this day, my son is still suffering from side effects of the heat stroke. The emotional and financial toll it has taken on him and our family has been unfathomable. We are sharing our story in the hope that it will never happen to someone else.

Sincerely,

Emily Clancy

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