



House Bill 1098

Use of Public Funds – Playground and Athletic Field Surfaces – Authorizations, Preferences and Prohibitions

Maryland Association of County Park &
Recreation Administrators

TO: Appropriations

Position: **OPPOSE**

Date: March 5, 2020

From: Kathy Burley, President

Maryland Association of County Park & Recreation Administrators (MACPRA) OPPOSES HB 1098.

The Maryland Association of County Park & Recreation Administrators is an affiliate of the Maryland Association of Counties and represents the Parks and Recreation departments of all 23 counties and Baltimore City – the professionals engaged in the delivery of Parks and Recreation services throughout Maryland.

First, we strongly disagree with the section of this bill that allows a portion of Program Open Space (POS) funds, meant for capital improvements, to be used for the maintenance and upkeep of grass athletic fields on lands owned by the state. These funds were established to assist counties in the preservation and development of properties. Using these capital fund dollars towards operating expenses would be a substantive change to the intent and use of the POS program.

Next, we have serious concerns about the section requesting that jurisdictions responsible for the construction of playgrounds or athletic fields give consideration and preference to natural surface materials when these facilities are being paid for with public funds. This a vague mandate that gives neither guidance, enforcement mechanisms or funding for what could be costly and restrictive amendments to capital projects.

MACPRA MISSION STATEMENT

The Maryland Association of County Park and Recreation Administrators (MACPRA) seeks to ensure the quality of life of our county citizens by advocating for recreation opportunities and facilities, parks and open spaces, and for the protection and preservation of the means through which these essential public rights are provided.

Finally, state funds, whether they are Program Open Space (POS) funds, state bonds, etc., 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. In every jurisdiction, these funds supplement capital budgets on some level to meet the local demands for services. Prohibiting the use of state funds for synthetic surfaces would create an equity issue. Only those jurisdictions who can afford either the state-of-the-art natural surface materials or to pay directly for their projects would be able to create access to these types of amenities. Maryland citizens who reside in regions that rely on state funding, of any kind, for their recreational improvements would have to do without.

We appreciate the benefits that both artificial and grass turf fields provide. We are grateful for the synthetic playground surfaces that enable individuals with disabilities access to our facilities. We contend that the installation and use of these amenities should remain a tool available to the local entities to deploy as their communities demand and see fit.

We urge the Committee to consider the consequences of this proposed legislation and return an **UNFAVORABLE** report.