



House Bill 1098

Use of Public Funds – Playground and Athletic Field Surface – Authorizations, Preferences and Prohibitions (Safe and Healthy Fields Act)

Wicomico County, Maryland

TO: Appropriations

Position: **OPPOSE**

Date: March 5, 2020

From: Steve Miller, Director of Recreation,
Parks & Tourism

Wicomico County, Maryland OPPOSES HB 1098 for three primary reasons.

1. Prohibiting use of State funds for synthetic surfaces for ballfields and/or playground surfaces puts less wealthy and smaller Counties (such as Wicomico County and our neighbors) at an extreme disadvantage. 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. The inability to use State funding would likely delay or outright cancel projects that would be used to increase recreational and tourism opportunities for our citizens and visitors to the County. As a result, this would have a negative financial impact as synthetic surfaces are utilized to host amateur sports tournaments that drive revenue both on a local and State level. Eliminating State funds would effectively take smaller Counties out of this arena and create financial hardship.
2. Synthetic surfaces can provide a number of benefits including consistent performance, increased hours of usage versus natural surfaces, increased access for those with disabilities, among other potential benefits. Again, smaller Counties would realize the negative impact of this legislation by not being able to afford these amenities which would reduce overall access, particularly for those with physical disabilities. For example, Wicomico County is in the planning stages for our first inclusive playground designed for individuals with disabilities. The proposed playground would include a poured in place surface. This legislation could eliminate this project as the County intends to rely upon State funding to reach overall project goals.

3. The County shares the position of the Maryland Association of County Park and Recreation Administrators (MACPRA) that Program Open Space has historically been intended to increase land preservation and public recreation for all. This bill would allow POS funds to be used for maintenance costs of natural surfaces which is a major departure from past practice in the POS program. Among other consequences, this could negatively impact County operating support of Recreation & Parks Departments across the State.

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