

March 5, 2020

Maryland General Assembly
Appropriations Committee, Room 121
House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Written Testimony in opposition of: House Bill No. 1098:

Submitted by:
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Soccer Association of Columbia
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Dear Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Jackson and members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Craig Blackburn and on behalf of Soccer Association of Columbia (SAC), I am writing in opposition to House Bill No. 1098. Establishing a preference for the use of natural surface materials to construct playgrounds or athletic fields will have a negative impact on the environment and the health of Maryland residents.

SAC was established in 1971 and has almost 6,000 boys and girls that play soccer. We have 5 synthetic fields in our private complex in Howard County Maryland. SAC brings in many teams from out of state for tournaments and our economic effect is over \$10,000,000 per year for the state.

The environmental benefits of synthetic turf in landscape and sports field applications are well-documented. Synthetic turf enables field owners to conserve millions of gallons of water each year. One typical grass sports field uses between 500,000 to a million gallons of water each year. As you recall, in mid-2019 Maryland experienced a lack of rain and unseasonably hot conditions which combined to produce what meteorologists called a “flash” drought. This followed the uneven rain and previous drought conditions earlier in the year. Synthetic turf offers an ideal solution to the state’s unsteady weather conditions. Additionally, unlike grass, synthetic turf does not require harmful lawn chemicals, like fertilizers and herbicides, that can leak into water systems in order to maintain a healthy and safe surface.

Moreover, the shock-absorbency and durability of synthetic turf allow it to be accessible for all children. Unlike grass fields, synthetic turf is designed to be widely usable and ADA-compliant, ensuring playgrounds can be enjoyed by children of all mobility needs. The layers of recycled rubber infill help absorb impact, protecting all users, including children and athletes, from surface impact injuries. In fact, a 2004 study comparing injury rates between grass and synthetic turf found that the injury rate on synthetic turf was 0.9 percentage points lower (3.5 percent versus 4.4 percent on grass). Synthetic turf also does not contain the allergens found in grass, therefore allowing people with pollen allergies to use these fields without fear of an allergic reaction.

Parks and sports fields with synthetic turf promote year-round activity on safe and resilient surfaces. The Centers for Disease Control and Protection (CDC) states that in the United States, the percentage of

children and adolescents affected by obesity has more than tripled since the 1970s. Additionally, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) recommends that children and adolescents aged 6 to 17 years should have at least 60 minutes of physical activity each day.¹ The CDC reports that of Maryland's children aged 2 years to less than 5 years, 16.5 percent are overweight and 15.7 percent are obese. Regarding Maryland's adults, 65.4 percent are overweight, and 27.1 percent are obese.² Synthetic turf fields enable increased activity in nearly all-weather conditions which helps reduce obesity and promotes well-being. Removing opportunities for children and adults to exercise will only exacerbate this growing problem.

Synthetic turf also provides a sustainable alternative for overused and unsafe grass sports fields. A grass field simply cannot remain lush if it is used more than three to four days a week, in the rain, or during the six months of the year when grass does not grow. Otherwise the field will become unsafe, rock-hard, and covered in dirt. Since synthetic turf can withstand so much wear and tear, many schools can even rent their synthetic turf fields to local sports teams and organizations to bring in extra funding for classrooms.

SAC remains dedicated to the continuous improvement of the performance and environmental impact of synthetic turf systems and is happy to assist in clarifying the uncertainties or questions that you may have concerning synthetic turf systems.

Thank you for your consideration.

Craig Blackburn

Executive Director

Soccer Association of Columbia

¹ 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for America, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, <https://health.gov/paguidelines/2008/pdf/paguide.pdf>.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity, Maryland State Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity Profile, <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/stateprograms/fundedstates/pdf/maryland-state-profile.pdf>.