

House Bill 1098

*Use of Public Funds - Playground and Athletic Field Surfaces
Authorizations, Preferences, and Prohibitions
(Safe and Healthy Field Act)*

Position: Opposed

Date: March 5, 2020

From: A. Raul Delerme, Director

Howard County Department of Recreation and Parks

The Howard County Department of Recreation and Parks is opposed to HB 1098.

State funds such as 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. Most importantly, in every jurisdiction, these funds supplement capital budgets on some level to meet the local demands for services.

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. Using state and local POS allocations for the maintenance and upkeep of natural grass fields is not sustainable, especially during a rainy season and for jurisdictions with very high demand for more fields and more use.

Natural grass fields cannot withstand the amount of year-round use that Recreation and Parks Department programs have on their fields. In certain jurisdictions, synthetic turf fields are used 6 hours Monday through Friday and 15 hours on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays. For one week a year (7 days straight) there are back to back tournaments played for 14 hours a day. Synthetic turf surfaces provide a consistent playing surface and can withstand the demand for year-round use. With the constant play of synthetic turf surface, youth and adults can continue with their daily practices and games without any cancellations to keep them active and playing without any down time.

Without having the flexibility of using POS funds for synthetic turf athletic field projects, the amount of play on a field and revenue that can be generated, will greatly affect a jurisdiction. Especially the smaller jurisdictions. Sports tourism and economic benefit for jurisdictions will also be affected. By eliminating rubber safety surfacing for playgrounds,

the ease of children with disabilities accessing playgrounds and other park amenities will be affected. This playground surfacing provides a consistent cushioned surface for falls.

This bill will also affect state funded high schools and universities who currently have and plan for future synthetic surface projects on their campuses. This becomes an equity issue for state funded schools who want to install surfaces but cannot if this bill is approved.

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