Maryland Turfgrass Council

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Testimony on: HB1547 – Environmental - Synthetic Turf and Turf Infill – Producer Responsibility.

Position: Support
Committee: Economic Matters
Hearing Date: February 19, 2020
Lead Sponsor: Delegate Mary Lehman

My name is Vernon W. Cooper. I am a Turfgrass Agronomist by training and spent more than thirty (30) years as the State Turfgrass Agronomist for the Maryland Department of Agriculture. In this position I helped develop and managed the Maryland Turfgrass Certification Program as well as being responsible for the enforcement of the Maryland Turfgrass Law and Regulations. During this time, I worked to resolve many natural turfgrass issues and promote natural turfgrass production and use.

Since that time, I have served as the Executive Director for the Maryland Turfgrass Council (MTC), an umbrella organization for all the turfgrass industries. The MTC has 900+ Turfgrass Professionals composed of Sod Farmers; Golf Course Superintendents; Landscape Managers; Sports Turf Managers; Suppliers, as well as multiple Municipalities all managing natural grass. Yes, we even have a few that are in the synthetic turfgrass installation business as well.

However, one thing all Turfgrass Professionals, both Natural and Synthetic have in common is their desire to do what is right, to protect our environment and especially protect our children.

With this in mind, **I urge you to support HB 1547**, a bill that requires cradle-to-grave accountability for synthetic turf fields and playground surfaces. As increasing numbers of grass fields are being replaced with plastic carpet, tire crumb and sand substrates, their after-use disposal is of great and growing concern.

Natural Turf Grass is biodegradable and when replacement is required the remaining material can be shredded and incorporated into the soil to increase the nutrients the new Natural Grass will need to grow, as well as increasing the organic matter content which help maintain water, nutrients, and make the soil softer upon impact by players.

However, Synthetic Grass will still be in our landfills and illegal dumps long after you, I and are grandchildren are gone. We all know plastic and rubber do not decompose very fast, especially after stopping field traffic and creating a huge ball of waste. A typical 80,000 square feet of a synthetic football field will provide 200 to 250 tons of waste which is not being disposed of properly, but instead is being disposed of often without concern for the environment. It has been shown that the plastic involved in the carpet contain toxic chemicals such as phthalates, heavy metals, flame retardants and the highly toxic PFAS class of non-stick chemicals. Additionally, when granulated tire waste is utilized you increase the toxicity expeditiously in the form of

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polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, heavy metals such as zinc, lead, and cadmium and carbon black. We have worked for years to remove these toxic substances from our homes, offices, and the environment; but now we are allowing it on synthetic fields for our children to play and roll on or to be burnt, buried in a landfill, or just dumped where these tiny organic compounds are spread by rain, runoff, wind, and use of the field. These are known carcinogens, endocrine disruptors, and neurotoxins.

Manufactures will tell you that a synthetic field will provide 8-10 years of service. What they don't tell you is that due to the lack of maintenance (always have installation money but never have sufficient maintenance money), and the over use of the field, that you are more realistically looking at 6 years or less. Many of these fields are shared between the School System and Recreation and Parks thus utilizing the fields from daylight to dusk and if lights are available that may go to 24/7 use.

Extended Producer Responsibility and Chain of Custody

Manufacturers typically develop, produce, and ship their merchandise to markets and, once sold, they are no longer held responsible for the use and disposal of their products. However, most manufacturers do not deliver a 200+ ton product containing hazardous materials. Many communities are being torn between having proper maintenance money and not being able to close Natural Turf Fields due to inclement weather or are struggling with increased demands on decreasing landfill space to dispose of Synthetic Turf. It is time to explore requiring that producers and purchasers account for their products' lifetime use.

This legislation begins to do just that. It requires a system as a "stewardship plan" for tracking the life cycle of Synthetic Turf Fields in Maryland, from the manufacturer to final disposal. It also acknowledges that the components of artificial turf require disposal that prevents environmental contamination. Finally, the bill places limitation on how components of the Synthetic Turf may be reused.

Every Synthetic Turf Field in Maryland represents a future disposal nightmare of enormous size and complexity. This legislation ensures that our communities will not be burdened with improper disposal of a major waste item. **We urge a favorable report on this bill.**

Respectfully Submitted:
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