



House Bill 505

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

MACo Position: **OPPOSE**

Date: February 8, 2018

To: Appropriations Committee

From: Leslie Knapp, Jr.

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **OPPOSES** HB 505. The bill would impose an unnecessary restriction on the use of state funds, including Program Open Space (POS) monies, for the installation of synthetic or artificial turf playing fields and playground surfaces.

HB 505 would require the state or local unit that is constructing a playground or athletic field to give a preference, to the maximum extent practicable, to natural surface materials if state funds are involved. The bill would also prohibit the use of state funds to build a new or replacement playground or athletic field with a synthetic surface.

Artificial and synthetic turf fields provide many recreational benefits over regular turf. The Maryland Association of County Park and Recreation Administrators (MACPRA) conservatively estimates that more than 3.5 million individuals play on artificial or synthetic turf fields in Maryland every year. They further report that research has shown that the fields do not increase the risk of injuries or cause other health concerns. The fields reduce exposure to pesticides and herbicides and allow for greater use than regular turf fields.

Restricting or discouraging the use of synthetic and turf fields would place an unnecessary hardship on already limited local funds. The General Assembly has considered and rejected synthetic turf bans or prohibitions nearly every year for the last five or six years.

MACo fully supports ongoing research into the safety of synthetic turf fields. As the bill's fiscal note indicates, there is a comprehensive and ongoing multi-agency federal research action plan (FRAP) that is studying the potential health effects of the fields. Announced in January of 2016, the FRAP includes the Environmental Protection Agency, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Consumer Product Safety Commission. It would be premature to consider any action regarding the use of POS or other state funding for synthetic turf fields while this research is underway.

HB 505 would impose an unnecessary and unwarranted hardship on local parks and recreation programs that is not currently supported by scientific research. Accordingly, MACo urges the Committee to give HB 505 an **UNFAVORABLE** report.