



House Bill 1118

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

MACo Position: **OPPOSE**

Date: March 12, 2019

To: Appropriations Committee

From: Leslie Knapp, Jr.

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **OPPOSES** HB 1118. 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.

In the parks and recreation world, both natural and synthetic turf fields play important roles and MACo believes it should be up to each individual jurisdiction to determine which type of field best meets the needs of the jurisdiction and their residents. Restricting or discouraging the use of synthetic turf fields and playgrounds would place an unnecessary hardship on already limited local funds. Additionally, the General Assembly has considered and rejected synthetic turf bans or prohibitions nearly every year for the last six years.

Synthetic turf fields do provide some benefits over regular turf. A properly managed synthetic turf surface can see more play time than natural turf and is also less costly to maintain. Synthetic turf also meets federal Americans with Disabilities Act requirements, while wood mulch and similar natural play areas do not. The fields also reduce exposure to pesticides and herbicides.

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. Billions of people have played on the surfaces worldwide.

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 1118 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 1118 an **UNFAVORABLE** report.