



Senate Bill 763

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

MACo Position: **OPPOSE**

Date: March 7, 2018

To: Budget and Taxation Committee

From: Leslie Knapp, Jr.

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **OPPOSES** SB 763. 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.

Artificial and synthetic turf fields provide many recreational benefits over regular turf, including increased usage time, reduced exposure to pesticides and herbicides, and reduced maintenance costs. They also help play areas meet accessibility requirements under the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Despite numerous studies and research, there is no comprehensive, peer-reviewed research that has conclusively shown that artificial or synthetic turf fields increase the risk of sports-related injuries or cause other health concerns. Artificial turf surfaces have been in use for over 50 years and billions of people have played on them worldwide. 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. If these fields are as toxic as the bill advocates maintain, there should be ample epidemiological evidence regarding their negative health effects.

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 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. The California Office of Environmental Health is also working on a comprehensive assessment that is expected to be completed in 2019. 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.

SB 763 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 SB 763 an **UNFAVORABLE** report.