



**Committee: Senate Budget and Taxation Committee**

**Testimony on: SB 763 : "Use of Public Funds - Playground and Athletic Field Surfaces - Preferences and Prohibitions," Lead Sponsor Senator Roger Manno**

**Position: Support**

**Hearing Date: March 7, 2018**

I submit this testimony in support of SB 763 "Use of Public Funds - Playground and Athletic Field Surfaces - Preferences and Prohibitions," on behalf of the Neighbors of the Northwest Branch of the Anacostia River, a 501(c)(3) volunteer organization dedicated to the ecological restoration of the Northwest Branch, with members in Montgomery and Prince Georges counties. We want to see this urban treasure safely enjoyed by wildlife, our families, and generations to come. We began to raise the alarm about artificial turf as early as 2009.

Our state now has more than a decade of experience with synthetic turf fields, time enough to realize just how bad these investments of public money have been from the perspective of child health, environmental health, and as it now becomes obvious, fiscal health.

By 2009, there were already 12 fields in Maryland partially paid for with Program Open Space funds, including \$563,000 for a field on existing parkland to be used for Montgomery Blair High School in Silver Spring. This field, as so many others, failed a year short of the warranty and had to be disposed of and replaced for \$750,000 in county funds. What does "failed" mean here? It means hardness dangerous to players as half the length of the plastic blades disintegrates into dust, while the tire crumb, which also disintegrates, migrates into children, homes, and our beleaguered streams via the storm drains. The president of Turf Reclamation Solutions, a company whose business is field removal, estimates that by 2018, 1000 turf fields a year will fail and need removal. That means some 100 million square feet of plastic carpet to be disposed of—land filled? Incinerated?!--and almost 30 million square feet of plastic dust spread into air, soil, and water over the life of the carpet, not to mention dust from the tire crumb.

This dust contains neurotoxins such as lead, mercury, and carbon black, carcinogens and endocrine disrupters such as phthalates, zinc, toxic to aquatic life, Round-Up to control weeds, biocides to control MRSA, and fire retardants. No government agency requires safety standards, testing, or monitoring of any of the toxins or of the excessive heat of these fields on a sunny day. We measured the Blair field at 160 degrees when the ambient temperature was in the 80s. These fields, once landfilled or incinerated, are then replaced with yet more petrochemical-based products. According to the fiscal note, we now have 48 of these fields funded in part with Program Open Space funds, and more rolled into school reconstruction.

It is time we stopped using state funds to launch cities and counties on this very expensive course of installing a dangerous product that must be disposed of at great expense and replaced about every 7 years—especially now that remarkable advances have been made in durable grass playing fields. This bill appropriately prohibits the use of state funds to finance any portion of a project to replace, or build a new playground or athletic field with synthetic surfaces, including the base foundation construction. It also requires the responsible entity to give preference to state-of-the-art natural surface materials when building a playground or athletic field to be paid for with public funds.

**We urge your support for this bill. It will discourage installation of unhealthy and fiscally irresponsible synthetic surfaces and encourage installation of sustainable, healthy cost effective durable natural surfaces. Please report favorably on SB 753.**



Anne J. Ambler, Vice President  
Neighbors of the Northwest Branch  
P.O. Box 4314  
Silver Spring, MD 20914  
[anambler@gmail.com](mailto:anambler@gmail.com)

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<sup>i</sup> **TRS President Mark Heinlein:** This means that each year nearly 100 million square feet of turf and half a billion pounds of sand/rubber infill will need to find a new home. If destined for the landfill, it is a staggering amount of waste. <http://www.recyclingartificialturf.com/trs-president-mark-heinlein-educates-opportunities-recycling-end-life-turf-fields>. See also Stuart Shalat, Professor and Director of the Division of Environmental Health, School of Public Health, Georgia State University, <https://theconversation.com/why-artificial-turf-may-truly-be-bad-for-kids-72044> and <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/weed-whacking-herbicide-p/>