



of the Anacostia River
P.O. Box 4314
Silver Spring, MD 20914

Testimony on HB 1118: Use of Public Funds - Playground and Athletic Field Surfaces - Authorizations, Preferences, and Prohibitions

Lead Sponsor: Delegate Solomon

Hearing in the House Appropriations Committee: 3/12/19 at 1:00 p.m.

Position: SUPPORT

I submit this testimony in support of HB1118 on behalf of the Neighbors of the Northwest Branch of the Anacostia River (NNWB), a 501(c)(3) volunteer organization dedicated to the ecological restoration of the Northwest Branch, with members in Montgomery and Prince Georges counties. I first want to thank the sponsors of this bill, Delegates Solomon, Acevero, Barron, Carr, Charkoudian, Cullison, Fraser-Hidalgo, Kelly, Korman, Krimm, Lehman, Lierman, Lopez, Love, Luedtke, Moon, Qi, Queen, Shetty, Stewart, Wilkins, and K. Young, who have had the foresight to recognize that installing artificial turf fields is major mistake on many levels.

NNWB 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, estimated in 2014 that by 2018, 1000 turf fields a year would fail and need removal. That means some 100 million square

feet of plastic carpet to be disposed of—land filled? Incinerated?ⁱ--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. The fiscal note for HB1118 reports that we have 56 synthetic athletic fields funded in part with Program Open Space funds, and more rolled into school reconstruction, plus a lot of children's playgrounds.

It is time we stopped using state funds to launch cities and counties on this very expensive treadmill of installing a dangerous product that must be disposed of at great expense and replaced about every 7-8 years. According to the fiscal note for **HB1142**, which would require closed-loop recycling, **the only disposal method appropriate to the risks posed by these fields**, Montgomery County estimates the disposal cost per field to rise by \$100,000 in FY 2020 and \$120,000 in FY 2024. Why subject ourselves to this fiscal pit—especially now that remarkable advances have been made in durable grass playing fields? **HB1118 wisely encourages healthy grass fields by allowing Program Open Space money for their maintenance and drainage systems, while prohibiting the use of state funds to finance any portion of a project to build a new or replace an existing playground or athletic field with synthetic surfaces. Please report favorably on HB1118.**



Anne J. Ambler, Vice President, NNWB
anambler@gmail.com

ⁱ **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), <https://theconversation.com/why-artificial-turf-may-truly-be-bad-for-kids-72044> and <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/weed-whacking-herbicide-p/>