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MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MD

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SAFE HEALTHY PLAYING FIELDS

BEYOND PLASTICS
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PUBLIC EMPLOYEES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

Conservation Montgomery

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P-SNAP
PHYSICIAN AND SCIENTIST NETWORK ADDRESSING PLASTICS AND HEALTH

BEYOND PLASTICS
MoCo Maryland

Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION

CFNPS
COMMUNITY FOR NATURAL PLAY SURFACES

Montgomery County
FAITH ALLIANCE CLIMATE SOLUTIONS

WMCCA

NCHR
NATIONAL CENTER FOR HEALTH RESEARCH
The Voice For Prevention, Treatment And Policy

ONE MONTGOMERY GREEN

TH!RD ACT
MARYLAND

CLIMATE COALITION
Montgomery County, MD

Healthy Babies Bright Futures

sugarloaf
CITIZENS ASSOCIATION

Dear State Representatives,

We are submitting this coalition letter in support of less costly, healthier, safer, and more sustainable natural grass school and public athletic fields. We are reaching out to ask for your support in sponsoring a bill to prohibit plastic turf fields in all public schools and public spaces in Maryland. We appreciate the support for HB1147: Playground Surfacing Materials Prohibitions and were hoping that you might be interested in sponsoring similar public health legislation that would protect all children in Maryland from the many hazards of more expensive plastic turf athletic fields.

Our children thrive in healthy, safe environments where they learn, play, and grow. Plastic turf is an unregulated, expensive, hot, toxic, unsustainable athletic surface that poses unnecessary risks to our kids and communities. Real grass athletic fields are safer, more cost-effective alternative that provides more equitable access to athletic fields for all kids and has been successfully implemented here in Maryland! Indeed, in 2023 Montgomery County leadership touted our very own real grass experts in the state, recognizing the Parks Department for their grass fields program! The Maryland SoccerPlex is also another prime example, recognized for its high-use, award winning real grass fields that can hold up even in the rain.

Thus, we would like to ask you to support our advocacy efforts for the safer, sustainable, more cost-effective choice to upgrade and maintain real grass school athletic fields in Maryland schools. With budget cuts happening in school districts across the state, we recognize the need for careful consideration in the allocation of our schools' limited resources. This proposed bill to ban plastic fields in public schools addresses both the fiscal and public health needs of our children and school communities.

What the Science Says

The science is clear, pointing to many health and environmental hazards linked to plastic turf such as:

- Increased risk of heat related illness on plastic turf, heat islands;
- Environmental contamination and increased risk of exposure to PFAS, microplastics, and other toxic chemicals that are associated with chronic health conditions such as hormone and cardiometabolic disruption, cancer, etc;
- Higher rates of skin abrasions and lower extremity injuries'
- Reduced access to green space and loss of the many mental, physical, cognitive, and health benefits of natural environments;
- Plastic production, use, and disposal that contributes to increased GHG emissions and global warming, plastic pollution, and more.

Plastic Turf Is Inequitable

It's imperative to center equity in these decisions for our students and staff. Hotter, more toxic plastic turf is not equitable for any child due to their physiological and developmental life-stage vulnerabilities. Children, especially those with asthma, allergies, and other underlying health

conditions, and those in communities already overburdened by pollution and lack of access to green space, face disproportionate risks from extreme heat and harmful chemical exposures associated with plastic turf.

An equitable school environment ensures that all children — from student athletes to physical education students — can safely participate without heightened health risks. Choosing safer, natural grass fields advances equity by reducing preventable exposures and creating athletic spaces that are accessible and protective for every family in Maryland. Given the many hazards associated with new-generation plastic turf, it should not be the default athletic surfacing for children and teens. This approach simply does not work if the goal is to proactively protect children's short and long-term health.

Plastic Turf Is Fiscally Irresponsible

To put it simply, our school districts haven't done their due diligence in oversight of spending for athletic fields. They have not conducted a full life-cycle cost analysis of plastic versus real grass to compare to the true monetary costs over the short and long-run. Nor have they fully considered the many health and environmental costs that are exacerbated by plastic turf (e.g. cost of cleaning up pollutants, costs of heat related illnesses in student athletes, cost of GHG emission from plastic production, use and disposal costs, etc). Plastic turf is expensive with such estimates for new plastic turf between $2.5-3.5 million and it generally has a usable life of just 8-10 years costing over $1 million to replace. Required maintenance, removal, and disposal makes plastic more expensive than well designed organically managed real grass fields, with plastic turf costs going up exponentially as more time passes.

Further, the "Pay to Play" supported by sports associations essentially privatizes our public athletic fields, limiting equal access to fields paid for by our tax dollars. There is an inherent conflict of interest tied to sports associations' and for-profit plastic industries' push for more plastic turf, perpetuating a cycle of plastic pollution, as well as short-sighted, fiscally irresponsible public school expenditure.

Other recent scientific case-studies have conducted cost analyses over relevant time periods, including replacement and disposal of plastic turf over its life-cycle. These case-studies consistently demonstrate the higher costs of plastic turf compared to real grass. (See this Cost-Analysis and this Case-Study.)

Our public schools' growing budget constraints necessitate prioritizing needs and true cost-effective approaches to fund our schools based on up-to-date science, data, and equity. Primary prevention strategies to reduce environmental and chemical hazards also have long-term monetary, health, and environmental benefits. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure! Equitably prioritizing our children's health in their school environments where they learn, play, and grow is critical to our shared commitment to evidence-based decision-making to better protect MCPS students' overall health and well-being.

Our Coalition

We represent environmental health organizations, scientists, healthcare providers, parents/caregivers, students, teachers, coaches, and community members. We are providing a few examples of local advocacy efforts in support of this coalition as well:

- Student Climate Action Council's 2025 Artificial Turfs Report recommendations
- MCCPTA Resolution on Synthetic Turf: Citing Health, Safety, Environmental, and Fiscal Concerns
- MD Free State PTA's Artificial Turf Resolution
- Montgomery County Sierra Club's Position on Artificial Turf
- Petition for Natural Grass Fields for Montgomery County Public Schools

Below is a list of organizations signing on to our coalition advocating for healthy play spaces and a healthy planet for our kids. **Collectively we represent tens of thousands of Montgomery County Residents and our Coalition is growing.** The public record holds significant correspondence from individual county residents, as well.

Organizations:

1. Katie Huffling, DNP, RN, CNM, FAAN, Executive Director, Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments
2. Baltimore County PTA
3. Diane Bild, MD, MPH, Beyond Plastics, Montgomery County, Maryland
4. Karl Held, Action Now lead, Climate Coalition Montgomery County
5. Amanda Farber, Co-chair, Conservation Montgomery
6. Community for Natural Play Surfaces (CFNPS)
7. Grace Chi and Sidharth Harishanker, Co-Presidents, Eco Moco
8. Green Sanctuary of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Silver Spring
9. Jane Houlihan, Research Director, Healthy Babies Bright Futures
10. Heinz Weverink, Vice President for Advocacy, Montgomery County Council of Parent Teachers Associations
11. Lee Langstaff, President, Montgomery Countryside Alliance
12. Sturt Simon, Chair, Montgomery County Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions
13. Carrie Witkop, Zero Waste Lead, Montgomery County Sierra Club
14. Diana Zuckerman, Ph.D., President, National Center for Health Research
15. Kathleen Michels, PhD, One Montgomery Green
16. Physician and Scientist Network Addressing Plastics and Health
17. Timothy Whitehouse, Executive Director, Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility
18. Diana Conway, President, Safe Healthy Playing Fields
19. Lauren Greenberger, President, Sugarloaf Citizens Association
20. Reid Detchon, Third Act Maryland
21. Unitarian Universalist Association

22. Carol Falk, President, West Montgomery County Citizens Association