

BILL: House Bill 1118
TITLE: Use of Public Funds - Playground and Athletic Field Surfaces -
Authorizations, Preferences, and Prohibitions
DATE: March 12, 2019
POSITION: OPPOSE
COMMITTEE: Appropriations Committee
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE), representing all of the state's local boards of education, opposes House Bill 1118.

MABE opposes this bill's proposal to ban the future use of state funds to finance any portion of a project to build new or replace existing playgrounds or athletic fields with a synthetic surface. Local boards and local departments of recreation and parks rely, and have relied for many years, on the use of safe, sustainable synthetic surfaces for such uses.

Local boards of education, in Maryland and across the nation, are aware that concerns have been raised by the public about the safety of recycled tire crumb and other materials used in playing fields and playgrounds in the United States. To the best of MABE's knowledge, limited studies have not conclusively shown an elevated health risk from playing on such fields and surfaces.

MABE supports the role of local decision making in evaluating the options for purchasing and maintaining athletic fields and playgrounds; decisions which are informed by an evaluation of currently available health and safety information. And, if the local decision is made to install an artificial surface, MABE does not believe that a ban on the use of state funds to contribute to the project is warranted.

MABE appreciates that the bill is drafted to be prospective in effect, but raises the concern that the ban would nonetheless impact long-term contracts which may include the costs of removing and replacing artificial turf fields at the end of their life cycle.

For these reasons, MABE requests an unfavorable report on House Bill 1118.