

Members of the County Council,

February 13, 2026

My name is Mary Kate Crawford, and I am a 15-year resident of Montgomery County, a mother of one MCPS student and the Vice-Chair of the county's Sports Advisory Committee. In addition to my role on the Sports Advisory Committee, I have worked at the University of Maryland within the University Recreation & Wellness department for nearly 20 years, with most of that time spent serving as the Intramural Sports Director.

Since the inception of our committee, we have met with many of you to discuss issues facing the county as they relate to youth sport participation, of which we received enthusiastic endorsement of our mission. You are likely also aware of our success in launching an Unsung Hero Award to county sport leaders, which was first presented to 3 outstanding residents last May. We also made a commitment to youth sport participants in the County through our endorsement of the Aspen's Institutes Children's Bill of Rights in Sports. This led to subsequent endorsements by the County, Montgomery County Recreation, and the cities of Gaithersburg, Rockville, and Takoma Park this past Fall.

Today, **I am asking you to consider the proposal to include funding in the CIP for synthetic turf fields at MCPS high schools and the North Potomac Community Recreation Field.** Although some information presented recently on this issue cites health and safety impacts as the primary justification for exclusion, I urge you to consider the complexities of this conversation.

Of course, with all physical activity there are risks to injury. However, recent research, including but certainly not limited to a 2024 OLO report on synthetic turf fields, finds no compelling evidence that turf fields pose a greater risk to athlete safety than natural grass fields. Those studies that found minimal increases in injury on turf fields are often based on comparison of grass fields that are used minimally, maintained at the highest level, and used for one sport. These are not "real life" conditions nor realistic to the use of fields within MCPS. Further, many studies that are being circulated as evidence of higher risk on synthetic turf fields are based on earlier generations of synthetic turf products, not on updated technology that is used to build the modern turf fields, like those that currently exist, and are planned in our county.

Like you, our committee cares deeply about the health and well-being of our community, particularly youth. We are passionate about increasing access to high quality sport *because* of the overwhelming evidence that points to youth sport participation as a predictor of *life-long* health outcomes. To attempt to disentangle access and participation from health and safety ignores the inextricable links between physical activity, and physical and mental health. To that end, synthetic turf fields provide nearly 4 times the number of playable hours over that of grass fields. This number is even greater when you consider the need to take grass fields offline for re-seeding for routine maintenance - a prime example being the brand new million-dollar grass field at Hillandale Local Park that after just 6 months of moderate use had to have a temporary fence installed to limit access.

In closing, the Sports Advisory Committee shares your concern for and commitment to public health and safety. We urge you to consider the complexity of the arguments presented to you regarding synthetic turf fields and to remind you of the inherent connection between *access* to sport opportunities and *life-long health*.

Thank you

Mary Kate Crawford, Ph.D, CWP

Sports Advisory Committee, Vice Chair

University of Maryland