

February 9, 2026

Montgomery County Council
Stella Werner Council Office Building
100 Maryland Ave
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear County Council,

I am submitting this written testimony as the MCCPTA Vice Chair of the Health and Wellness Committee. I am also a mother of two young soccer players, a Montgomery County resident, and an environmental and public health scientist. In my professional capacity, I have worked on children's environmental health, cumulative impacts, and chemical policy at the local, state, national, and international levels, most recently at the EPA before my job was eliminated this summer.

The MCCPTA Health and Wellness Committee urges County Council to provide funding in the CIP for the following:

1. HVAC repair and replacement;
2. Universal access to filtered, well maintained hydration stations in all schools; and
3. Healthier, safer, more sustainable athletic fields.

Over the past seven years, the Health and Wellness Committee has partnered closely with County Council, MCPS's facilities department, and students to advocate for stronger indoor air quality (IAQ) and water quality protections. While progress has been made in installing indoor air quality monitors and more filtered hydration stations in every school, there are still gaps. Specifically, we are advocating for funding to address the approximately [740 million dollar HVAC backlog](#), by prioritizing HVAC upgrades based on [real time data](#) and [science-based thresholds](#) we helped develop alongside MCPS facilities leadership.

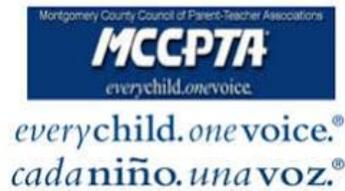
We are also advocating for funding for more filtered hydration stations and maintenance per manufacturer specifications to provide all students and staff access to safer drinking water. Drinking water sources are still testing positive for lead in our schools and the most vulnerable including our preschoolers, kindergarteners, and those in schools with less PTA funding for filtered hydration stations have less access to safer filtered drinking water. Further, MCPS must adopt a policy for maintaining hydration stations based on manufacturer specifications to ensure filters are effective and aren't posing new risk due to microbial buildup from lack of adequate flushing, aeration cleaning, filter replacement, etc.

Prioritizing funding for these efforts will better protect our students and staff's indoor learning environment where they spend the majority of their time.

I am also sharing the [MCCPTA Resolution on Synthetic Turf: Citing Health, Safety, Environmental, and Fiscal Concerns](#) which passed with a large majority (51 in favor vs 15 opposed) in the Delegates Assembly on January 27, 2026. This resolution advocates for safer, healthier, more sustainable, and cost-effective MCPS athletic fields. It aligns with the [Student Climate Action Council's 2025 Artificial Turfs Report recommendations](#) and the [MD Free State PTA's Artificial Turf](#) resolution.

The MCCPTA resolution reflects a growing body of independent, peer-reviewed scientific research and real-world data identifying significant concerns associated with **new generation plastic turf**, with a particular focus on plastic turf's risks to children and teens' health and their environment. The resolutions recommendations include:

1. The initiation of an RFP for the installation and **sustainable expert** maintenance of state-of-the-art natural grass fields.



2. Pausing installation of new synthetic turf fields until an RFP for real grass is issued and MCPS engages meaningfully in the decision making process with MCCPTA and other stakeholders.
3. Installation of visible warning signs at all synthetic turf fields in Montgomery County to spread awareness on the heat risks and toxic chemicals associated with these plastic products.
4. Request MCPS update their heat policy for synthetic turf based on current health-based standards.

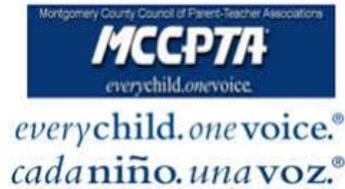
As a mother of a child with a chronic health condition who loves to play soccer, I've seen first hand the impacts of less play time on plastic turf. This is why it's all the more imperative to center equity in these decisions for our students and staff. Hotter, more toxic plastic turf is not equitable for any child. Children and staff, especially those with asthma, allergies, and other underlying health conditions, face disproportionate risks from extreme heat, airborne particulates, and 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 truly accessible and protective for every family in Montgomery County.

Children and adolescents are not little adults, nor are they guinea pigs. Their developing bodies are more susceptible to adverse health impacts from [extreme heat](#) and exposure to toxic chemicals even at low levels. Carcinogenic, hormone disrupting, neurotoxic, immunotoxic, reprotoxic chemicals, etc [found in the different components of synthetic turf](#) may be absorbed through the skin, via inhalation, and ingestion, impacting children physiologically and developmentally. Further, playing on synthetic turf can expose children simultaneously to extreme heat and complex chemical mixtures with potential synergistic adverse health effects. Children also breathe more air and drink more water per unit of body weight than adults, which puts them at increased risk of toxic exposures than adults. In considering children and teens' unique life-stage susceptibilities, it is critical to take a preventative approach to reducing harmful environmental exposures for their short and long-term health. In recognizing the chemical and heat hazards that have been found in new-generation plastic turf, it should not be the default athletic surfacing for schools where children and teens are the intended users. This sort of chemical management simply does not work if the goal is to proactively prevent exposures before they occur to better protect children's short and long-term health.

A perfect example of this sort of poor chemical management can be seen in the case of tire infill and shredded tire derived playground surfacing. For years Montgomery County allowed the use of tire crumb rubber infill in school athletic fields and other places children played until County Council (see [county resolution](#)) and the state legislature (see [HB1147](#)) took science-backed action to better protect children from the many known environmental health hazards found in tire derived materials. Unfortunately, this was only after many children were already exposed and the legacy contaminants had leached into our environment. Defaulting to unregulated plastic turf without doing our due diligence to understand its full life-cycle costs and known environmental health harms is negligence. We must consider the far reaching, costly, intergenerational public and environmental health harms of plastic turf and consider the availability of a safer, more cost effective alternative — natural grass.

In conclusion, the MCCPTA Health and Wellness Committee urges you to prioritize CIP funding for HVAC repair and replacement, universal access to filtered, well maintained hydration stations in all schools, and healthier, safer, more sustainable athletic fields. MCPS' budget constraints further 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 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 and staff's overall health and well-being.

Please see the appendix for more scientific resources and case-studies.



Sincerely,

Hannah Donart, MPH
 MCCPTA Vice Chair, Health and Wellness Committee

Attachment: Safe Health Playing Fields, (Beyond Plastics Affiliate) and MCCPTA Office of Legislative Oversight Critique
 Appendix below

Appendix:

1. [MCCPTA Resolution on Synthetic Turf: Citing Health, Safety, Environmental, and Fiscal Concerns](#). Passed by DA January 27, 2026
2. **Real-world data on real grass:** Below are case-studies of organically and sustainably managed natural grass fields.
 - [Building an Organic Maintenance Program for Athletic Fields - Fact Sheet 2021](#) (pdf)
 - [Natural Grass Playing Fields Case Study: Denison University, Granville, OH - Case study 2021](#) (pdf)
 - [Natural Grass Playing Field Case Study: Southwest Pennsylvania - Case study 2021](#) (pdf)
 - [Natural Grass Playing Field Case Study: Martha's Vineyard, MA - Case study 2020](#) (pdf)
 - [Natural Grass Playing Field Case Study: Marblehead, MA - Case study 2019](#) (pdf)
 - [Natural Grass Playing Field Case Study: Springfield, MA - Case study 2019](#) (pdf)
 - [Chevy Chase Webinar](#)
3. **What current science does tell us:** There is a growing body of scientific research on this topic that has found much hotter plastic turf surface temperatures and many hormone disrupting, carcinogenic chemicals detected in all components of the plastic turf. Please also see the extensive body of research that has been conducted by independent scientists from [University of MA, Lowell](#), the [Collaborative for Health and Environment](#), [Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility](#), [Sierra Club](#), [Beyond Plastics](#), [Mount Sinai](#), and more!
4. **Costs:** Please review this [recent report](#) and [this report](#) that offer a systematic and scientific evaluation of the economic costs of both surfaces over a 25 and 16 year time horizon respectively. It's important to note that these costs do not include any environmental health costs such as water treatment for nano, micro, and microplastics, in addition to other harmful chemical exposures, heat related illness, environmental costs of plastics and chemicals migrating etc.
 - a. This University of Massachusetts, Lowell Center for Sustainability Production and Toxics Use Reduction Institute life [cycle cost analysis](#) compares plastic turf to grass. This give a relative estimation of a 65,000 square foot field over a 16 year time horizon.

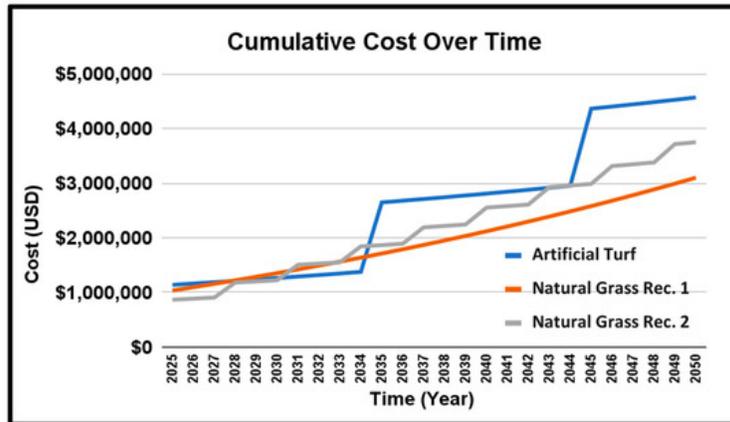
Table 12: Sample Life Cycle Cost Estimate (65,625 square foot field)

	Natural		Synthetic (replacements in years 8 & 16)	
	Low	High	Low	High
Installation*	\$39,000	\$328,000	\$295,000	\$673,000
Annual Maintenance*	\$4,000	\$14,000	\$4,000	\$4,000
Annual Labor (hrs)*	250	750	300	300
Annual labor cost	\$5,000	\$15,000	\$6,000	\$6,000
Resodding (yrs 6, 11, 16)	\$25,000	\$45,000	\$0	\$0
Disposal & resurfacing & transport & landfill*	\$0	\$0	\$557,000	\$642,000
Net Present Value	\$197,000	\$753,000	\$1,189,000	\$1,676,000

*Source: SportsTurf Managers Association. [no date.] A Guide to Synthetic and Natural Turfgrass for Sports Fields. 3rd edition. Lawrence, KS: STMA. Assumptions: Hourly rate \$20; interest rate 3%, disposal/resurfacing occurs in years 8 & 16; natural grass resodding in years 6, 11 and 16; conversion factor used to calculate annualized cost from NPV 0.0796. In the scenarios used here, at year 16 the field is in equally good condition as in year 1.



- b. More recently, the town of Verona commissioned PSEG Institute for Sustainability Studies, Montclair State University, Montclair, NJ to conduct this [study](#), which is over a 25 year time horizon. The big takeaway is that over a longer time horizon the costs for plastic turf exceed both types of real grass fields. There are three scenarios depicted here:
 - i. "Recommendation 1 includes a water recycling system, Kentucky bluegrass/Perennial ryegrass, a sand-based root zone, and seeding. It requires frequent aeration (3–5 times/year) and full-time organic land management.
 - ii. "Recommendation 2 lacks water recycling, uses tall fescue on native soil with sodding, and requires short-term training, organic pesticides, and general organic considerations.
 - iii. Plastic turf."



- 5. Hours of play on synthetic turf may be exaggerated by using calculations based on the booked/scheduled hours of play, not the actual hours of play, practice, and informal recreation. The difference between the two can be significant. For example the difference between the 2019 [Springfield, MA case-study](#) cites 1,051 hours of use vs. the [Montgomery County OLO report](#) cites an average of 486 permitted use hours.
 - a. The first chart drawn from the 2019 case study, provides information on [Springfield, MA's organically managed athletic field use](#) and states that it fully met the community's needs for sports and other recreational activities, with high quality grass and soil.

Table 6: Treetop Park soccer field (117,771 sq. ft.): Hours of use for sports practice and games, 2018

Sport	Age Group	Season	Total Use: Hours per Week*	Total Use: Hours per Season
Soccer	Adult	Spring	11	160
	Youth	Spring	12	170
Soccer	Adult	Fall	20	280
	Youth	Fall	18	245
Total documented sports team use – all seasons			61	855
Estimated informal recreation hours			7	196
Estimated total hours – all seasons			68	1,051

*Soccer is played year-round at Treetop Park. Spring and fall seasons were 14 weeks each. Informal use hours were calculated for 28 weeks.
Hours do not account for cancellations. There were approximately 24 hours of soccer cancellations in 2018.

- b. The second chart is from the [Montgomery County's Office of Legislative Oversight report only provides information on hours rented](#) and does not include time used by schools for PE and athletics stating, "These hours correspond to rectangular fields only. This data does not include walk-on play/cell phone league play or play on MCPS fields for physical education class and athletic team practices/games."



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Montgomery County Athletics Fields, FY23 Hours of Permitted Use, by Rectangular Field Type

	MCPS and Recreation Fields			Parks Fields		
	Synthetic	Grass	All	Synthetic	Grass	All
# Fields Rented	14	102	116	4	151	155
# Hours Rented	21,341	49,589	70,930	7,559	63,680	70,240
Average Hours per Field	1,524	486	611	1,890	415	453

- c. As the OLO report states, maintenance is also critical to playable hours. While MCPS plastic turf receives expert contractor funds for maintenance, MCPS does not include contracted expert maintenance for grass fields. Thus, MCPS status quo for real grass maintenance puts real grass at a severe disadvantage setting these grass fields up to fail. The MCCPTA resolution recommends funding for real grass that includes expert maintenance just as plastic grass currently receives.
- 6. [Beyond Pesticides Organic vs. Chemical Land Management.](#)
- 7. Research and health care organizations calling for transitioning away from synthetic turf are:
 - a. [The California Medical Association](#)
 - b. [Santa Clara County Medical Association](#)
 - c. [Children’s Environmental Health Center, Mt. Sinai Hospital, New York City](#)
 - d. [Physicians for Social Responsibility](#)
 - e. [The Consortium for Children’s Environmental Health](#)
 - f. [The Silent Spring Institute](#)
 - g. [Lowell Center for Sustainable Production, Univ. of Mass., Lowell](#)
- 8. State and Local Policies & Local Partners:
 - a. Maryland State Laws: [HB0457](#) and [HB1147](#)
 - b. Growing list of laws from around the country:
 - i. [Artificial Turf and Playgrounds: State Initiatives](#)
 - ii. [Artificial Turf and Playgrounds: Municipal and Regional Initiatives](#)
 - c. Local partners & natural grass turf experts that are right in our backyard!
- 9. [Petition for Natural Grass Athletic Fields for Montgomery County Public Schools](#), co-sponsored by the Student Climate Action Council