

February 2, 2026

Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Avenue, 6th Floor
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Dear President and Members of the Montgomery County Council,

Across the country, Boards of Education too often fail to exercise meaningful oversight of Capital Improvement Program (CIP) budgets. Montgomery County's Board of Education (BOE) is no exception, particularly with respect to the quiet, systematic expansion of artificial turf stadium fields at Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) high schools.

The County Executive appropriately removed MCPS's artificial turf request from the CIP. Responsibility now shifts to the County Council to uphold that decision. Councilmembers should support the CIP cut and continue to fund stadium grass fields at MCPS high schools.

For years, MCPS has embedded artificial turf stadium fields into new high school construction and major renovation projects without explicit BOE authorization. Artificial turf is routinely bundled into construction designs submitted for BOE funding approval, and over time, BOE members appear to have accepted the incorrect premise that rejecting a discretionary design element such as artificial turf would delay or jeopardize an entire school project. Artificial turf is not a structural necessity. Approval of a construction design is not the same as adoption of policy, and conflating the two carries significant long-term financial, environmental, and public health consequences. Decisions to install artificial turf fields have been made internally by Superintendent staff and presented to the BOE as a fait accompli.

The BOE is responsible for establishing policy direction and providing oversight for major facilities decisions that affect student health, safety, educational use, environmental impacts, and long-term fiscal obligations. Yet, BOE members have publicly acknowledged that they have not

conducted due diligence regarding artificial turf fields at MCPS high schools. This represents governance by inertia—a “do nothing” decision with lasting implications for student health, environmental exposure, and public cost.

Given this lack of formal policy oversight, the Montgomery County Council should not fund the MCPS Outdoor Play Space and Athletic Infrastructure request as currently proposed. Approving the request without clear policy guidance would send the wrong message. Large scale infrastructure decisions particularly those affecting student safety, environmental health, and long-term County obligations must be grounded in transparent, formally adopted policy, not automatically embedded in MCPS construction plans.

Also, MCPS’s maintenance practices for stadium grass fields warrant close scrutiny. Evidence suggests that high school stadium grass fields may receive maintenance comparable to baseball fields, which is insufficient for stadium grass and the types of sports played on it. Poor maintenance causes stadium grass fields to deteriorate prematurely, limits field availability, and increases injury risk. More importantly, a poorly maintained grass field is not proof that a grass field is inadequate. It reflects insufficient operating maintenance funding and inconsistent maintenance practices for stadium grass fields.

This concern is highlighted in the Montgomery County Council Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) report, “A Comparison of Natural Grass and Synthetic Turf Athletic Fields in Montgomery County,” which identified the need for changes to MCPS grass field maintenance practices. According to the report, “MCPS staff plan to develop a centralized field maintenance team to assume responsibility for high school field upkeep from individual schools. This change is intended to allow MCPS to determine weather-related field closures independently and eliminate the Adopt-A-Field Program and other historical use arrangements on high school fields”. It appears that MCPS intended to standardize grass field maintenance practices, improve safety, and better manage weather related closures.

It is clear that the BOE must exercise increased oversight and provide specific policy direction to MCPS to ensure that large-scale infrastructure decisions with long-term financial implications are guided by full life cycle cost presentations for MCPS high school stadium fields, provide multiple options including at least one feasible grass alternative, and actual operating maintenance costs, and where applicable, identification of any missing information in the analyses.

The County Executive's proposed cut for artificial turf fields is justified and on point. It also provides an opportunity for the BOE to strengthen governance and fiduciary oversight of all MCPS high school stadium fields through due diligence.

Sincerely,
Jane Cunningham