

Mary Linneman
SOUTH PORTLAND
LD 1177

Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera and members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee. My name is Mary Linneman and I am from South Portland. I would like to testify in support of LD 1177, "Resolve, Establishing a 3-year Moratorium on the Installation or Reinstallation of Synthetic Turf and Requiring a Study of the Public Health and Environmental Risks of Synthetic Turf".

I'd like to address three reasons in support of a state-wide synthetic turf moratorium: It is Efficient; it is Effective; and it showcases Maine's Environmental Leadership.

Over the past six months I have been a member of a group of citizens who have been strongly advocating for the installation of natural grass athletic fields rather than synthetic turf fields at South Portland High School. A referendum to install synthetic turf fields was defeated in November of 2024. Since that time, we have continued to maintain a persistent presence while actively commenting at school board meetings. Our involvement has not only educated members and citizens about the negative consequences of synthetic turf, but influenced the school board's decision to give voters a choice between natural grass and synthetic turf athletic fields on a new referendum to be voted on in November 2025.

This process has been time-consuming and exhausting for those of us involved. We are fortunate that we had scientists, physicians, educators and seasoned environmental activists in our group who had the time and energy to commit to this action. We spent many hours doing research on the current scientific understanding of the direct and indirect consequences of artificial installations on the environment and human health. (The evidence we found is overwhelmingly clear that it is a poor environmental choice to install synthetic turf and replace natural grass with synthetic chemicals which have negative environmental and health consequences at all points in its lifespan.) However, this work need not be duplicated by each municipality considering the question of grass versus synthetic turf. This work can be Efficiently accomplished at the state level, eliminating the need for similar duplication of effort by individual towns.

I am in support of LD 1177 because I believe that the state is in the best position to Effectively provide objective and vital information and guidance to municipalities about the important facts related to synthetic turf and natural grass installations. Not all communities have the resources to collect and discern the scientific and technical details related to this controversial topic.

(When a synthetic turf field is installed, the synthetic and toxic chemicals that are found in every component of the installation are immediately in contact with the surrounding ecosystem. As a result of wear and age, as well as a result of leaching, these chemicals make their way into the soil, water, vegetation and wildlife, with disastrous results. Given the significant water resources in Maine, these locally released chemicals easily move through the watersheds and eventually end up in Casco Bay and the Atlantic Ocean. Numerous scientific research efforts have documented these routes of pollution, particularly of plastic turf particles of all sizes, which can be easily identified from filtered samples of streams, rivers and ocean bays near large cities with lots of artificial turf installations.)

One of the challenges is that the industry standards are continually changing and it is difficult to know how to obtain the most accurate and up to date information needed to make an informed decision. The state can establish expectations of the industry and establish guidelines for how decisions are made in order to protect cities, the environment and people.

Again, this is good justification for the state, which has a responsibility to take steps to protect our environment from harmful pollutants, to establish regulations regarding the installation or exclusion of artificial turf fields, given their impact on water quality and ecosystem health far away from the site of installation.

Maine has been an Environmental Leader in many endeavors, but is not alone in attempting to convene an extensive research committee to investigate public health and environmental risks as well as fiscal parameters related to the question of synthetic versus natural grass athletic fields. These studies are made available to the public and can serve as an excellent starting point for such an investigation by the state of Maine. In the Northeast alone, Massachusetts towns (Wayland, Concord, Boston) and Connecticut municipalities have enacted bans, moratoriums or local laws severely restricting the use of artificial turf. New Jersey has rejected proposals to install synthetic turf; New York has banned the sale of synthetic turf containing PFAS (forever chemicals) starting at the end of 2026. Colorado and California also have laws restricting the use of plastic/synthetic turf. The European Union and Canada are also doing research and banning synthetic turf components.

There are northeastern research facilities that Maine can turn to for the most recent studies. (The Toxic Use Reduction Institute at UMass Lowell and the Department of Environmental Medicine at Icahn School of Medicine at Mt. Sinai University are two such facilities.) In addition, there are highly-regarded consultants who are familiar with the installation of organic grass athletic fields (e.g., Osborne Organics) in Maine.

The 3 Year Moratorium on the Installation or Reinstallation of Synthetic Turf and Requiring a Study of the Public Health and Environmental Risks of Synthetic Turf is a good idea because:

It is Efficient - using existing research reports and consultation research institutes to gather objective and comprehensive information on public health and environmental impacts of synthetic turf.

It is Effective - suspending installation of synthetic fields so that all communities in Maine will be informed through having access to objective information regarding public health and environmental risks of synthetic turf as they consider decisions in their local communities.

It showcases Maine Environmental Leadership - joining other communities in the U.S. and around the world in increasing awareness of potential consequences of synthetic turf installations on environmental health, including water, soil, vegetation and wildlife; and also reminding Maine citizens of the importance of reducing the use of plastics.