

Environmental & Natural Resources Committee

Testimony of Zach Lemelin - Athletic Director, Sanford School Department Against LD1177

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

Dear members of the Environmental & Natural Resources Committee, I appreciate the time given to address the committee. As the athletic director for the Sanford School Department, I am fortunate enough to work in one of the best school districts in our great state. Sanford High School has a population of nearly 1,100 students, with almost 50% participating in athletics at the high school level. Sanford Middle School is equivalent to SHS in terms of population and participation, which is something we are extremely proud of as a community and want to continue to protect and increase opportunities and participation when possible, because as we know, the more our youth are engaged, the higher levels of success they reach in all aspects of life.

Sanford is a hardworking community that is proud of the opportunities we can provide for our students. In particular, the state-of-the-art high school that was completed and opened in 2018. A major part of this project, which was funded by local tax dollars, is our turf field at Alumni Stadium. Our community knew this would be an asset, as we only had grass facilities in the past. Having a turf field allows our student-athletes to compete in one of the best facilities in the state. Alumni Stadium is a facility that is sought out multiple times a year for regional and state championship contests in soccer, field hockey, and boys & girls lacrosse from the Maine Principals Association. At the community level, our facility is used to help host the Sanford Soccer Association's annual Pete Levasseur tournament, which has more than 150 teams competing in the youth soccer tournament, along with multiple youth football games in this venue each year. All of these events take place in conjunction with the 85-plus games in the fall and spring, and practices 6 days a week to accommodate the high school teams. Simply put, if Alumni Stadium did not have a turf field, we would not have the ability to host these events, which would be demoralizing for our community.

The wear & tear on a grass field from daily sports practices and multiple games a week would make our fields unsuitable and potentially unsafe due to the seasonal weather conditions we experience in our state. As a community, we take great pride in the opportunities and experiences that we can offer our youth and young adults, and the decision to install a turf field was not something we took lightly.

Our community and the previous athletic director spent countless hours researching and developing a plan to answer any questions that might arise as to whether or not turf fields are

unsafe. It was determined that, while there are risks associated with nearly every decision we make in life, the opportunities a turf field presents would outweigh any of the risks for our community in supporting our student-athletes.

Proposing a ban on synthetic turf will create an issue across our community and state, and in my opinion, cost the taxpayers more money in maintenance and care that most schools/communities cannot afford or find the knowledgeable and trained individuals to provide maintenance on grass fields. This bill would create a higher chance for unsafe playing fields, missed opportunities for skill development, and a lack of championship-caliber venues for the youth and high school student-athletes across this state. As an educator, athletic director, and parent, I want to help provide the best opportunities for our students and children when it comes to community-based sports and education-based athletics in the State of Maine, and this bill would be counterintuitive to that process.

I once again thank the committee for your consideration, and I respectfully ask for your opposition to LD 1177

Sincerely,

Zach Lemelin
Athletic Director
Sanford School Department

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