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Testimony of Rep. Lori K. Gramlich presenting

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

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

Good morning, Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera and distinguished members of the Joint Select Committee on the Environment and Natural Resources. My name is Lori Gramlich, and I proudly represent the lovely seaside community of Old Orchard Beach, House District 131. I am here to present ***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 believe that this bill is a critical step toward safeguarding the health and well-being of our children, our communities and our environment.

Artificial turf has been around since the 1960s and has become increasingly popular. There are currently around 19,000 artificial turf fields across the U.S. Its popularity is due to the fact that it's more durable than natural grass and easier to maintain. However, just because something is more convenient doesn't mean that it is better for the health and environment of our communities. Mounting evidence points to significant risks that this material poses, especially in the context of its widespread use on playgrounds and athletic fields where children play and learn. LD 1177 would allow time for the Department to study the health and environmental impacts of artificial turf and give schools that are considering turf time to come up with alternate plans if necessary.

Children are particularly vulnerable to the toxic chemicals and microplastics present in artificial turf. Many synthetic fields are made with crumb rubber, a material that is composed of recycled tires, which contains hazardous substances such as heavy metals, benzene and phthalates. Benzene can cause blood and respiratory issues, and phthalates can cause neurodevelopmental issues in children. While some turf manufacturers are moving away from the rubber crumb infill to more environmentally sound materials, there are still toxics in other parts of the turf, in particular the plastic blades. The plastic sloughs off the blades into microplastics that our kids inhale and end up in our soil and water.

Another issue with artificial turf is increased injuries, particularly from heat exposure. The Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai released a position paper¹ arguing against artificial turf because of the chemicals used and the issue of heat islands with turf, saying that: “Vigorous play in these conditions conveys a very real risk of burns, dehydration, heat stress, or heat stroke. Children are less able to regulate their body temperature than adults, making them particularly susceptible to conditions of extreme heat.” As Maine’s climate warms, we need to make sure we are protecting our kids from possible heat-related injuries as they play.

With all this information, why not ban artificial turf outright, why ask the Department to do a study and do a moratorium? For a couple of reasons. First off, there is data out there and studies that point to all the issues I’ve raised, but they aren’t always easy to find for the average parent, and the information is scattered. If the Department pulls all of that information together, it is easier for my constituents and for Mainers in general to find that information and know that it’s been vetted by a reputable source. I think it is important to have the information easily accessible to people.

Additionally, putting the three-year moratorium on the use of turf signals to the school districts that this is an issue that we are concerned about and gives them time to make adjustments and look for alternatives if they were considering moving to artificial turf. It’s also my understanding that the Principal’s Association has requirements for turf use for certain types of games. This gives them time to look at their rules and regulations and adjust as necessary.

I also understand that the Department is going to oppose this bill and I respect their reasons. I still believe this is very important for the health and safety of all of our kids, and I hope that doesn’t deter members of the committee from supporting this legislation. I urge you to consider the safety of both our children and our environment and support this important legislation.

Senate President Mattie Daughtry, who has also been working on these issues throughout her time in the Legislature, is not able to be here in person today but will be submitting written testimony, and I encourage you to read it.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this proposal. I am happy to try to answer any questions you may have for me.

¹ <https://mountsinaiexposomics.org/position-statement-on-the-use-of-artificial-turf-surfaces/>