

Testimony of Benjamin Grassi, a senior at Mount View High School in Thorndike, Maine

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 Before the Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services Committee

April 9th, 2025

Good morning, Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera, and members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee. My name is Ben Grassi. I live on an organic vegetable farm in Freedom, Maine, and I am a Senior at Mount View High School in Thorndike. Please accept this testimony in support of LD 1177, which would create a three-year moratorium on the use of new artificial turf.

I come before you today to voice my concerns regarding the use of artificial turf on athletic fields. As a student athlete at Mount View High School, and two-year Captain of the Varsity Soccer Team, I have played on both grass and turf fields. From my years of playing soccer, I have come to see the many benefits of grass fields and, more recently, the disadvantages of turf. On turf, the ball moves differently, and injuries happen much more frequently. I have experienced heightened levels of exhaustion as well as knee and hip pain after playing on turf. Starting and stopping, running and jumping are exceptionally taxing due to the slippery rubber pebble-like surface. Additionally, "rug burn" from sliding on artificial turf are painful and heal more slowly than a similar injury on natural grass.

I think it's worth noting that "the NFL Players Union asked the league to switch its 15 turf fields to natural grass, often citing non-contact injuries on artificial surfaces." As stated by the Players Union, they are at higher risk of injury on turf fields. There is ample research to support this claim. In 2019, the U.S. Women's National Soccer Team filed a lawsuit against World Cup organizers demanding that they are no longer forced to play on artificial turf.

Recently, after learning more about LD 1177, I have read about the toxic chemicals that players like myself are exposed to on turf fields. Five years ago, my younger brother attended a youth soccer camp at an indoor turf facility. After spending one day at the camp, he was forced to stay home because the fumes from the turf were giving him an intense headache. When I played on turf in high school, I noticed that the air felt drier on the turf, I ran out of breath faster, and got dehydrated more easily. In addition to the chemicals released from the turf, it also absorbs more heat than natural grass, causing the field to rise to high temperatures.

As you consider state policy around artificial turf, it is my hope that you prioritize the health and success of Maine student athletes rather than any perceived benefits regarding ease of maintenance and cost savings.

I urge you to vote unanimously "Ought to Pass" on LD 1177
Thank you for your time,

Ben Grassi