



**University of Maine System Testimony In Opposition
to 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 — Presented by UMS Chief External &
Governmental Affairs Officer Samantha Warren — April 9, 2025**

Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources: My name is Sam Warren and I am the Chief External & Governmental Affairs Officer for the University of Maine System (UMS).

Thanks to the generosity of the Harold Alfond Foundation, New Balance Athletics, Phil and Susan Morse, and hundreds of other donors, the University of Maine's athletic facilities are currently undergoing a historic transformation. This long-overdue modernization is necessary to maintain excellence in the state's only NCAA Division I athletics program, strengthen gender equity, and provide a preferred destination for high school sports championships, large academic fairs and competitions, and community events.

As part of this project, construction is underway of the New Balance Track & Field and Soccer Complex — a state-of-the-art soccer turf complex for the reigning America East champion Black Bear women's soccer program. **Consistent with our commitment to the safety and success of our student-athletes and with the goals of Maine's PFAS in Products law, UMaine has contracted with a manufacturer that has had its turf product verified as being PFAS-free**, as determined by approved U.S. Environmental Protection Agency methods. Multiple PFAS compounds were tested for, including those regulated by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection and those listed in the latest European Union REACH and California Proposition 65 regulations. Furthermore, the product complies with the United States Consumer Product Safety Commission's most stringent requirement for children's toys and is produced in ISO-certified factories. The Black Bears' baseball field will be resurfaced in 2026-27 using a similar turf product to the soccer field project. That turf will also be certified as containing no detectable amounts of PFAS.

Turf fields have become the standard in collegiate sports. In fact, 71 of the 75 NCAA Division III schools in New England have direct access to turf fields either on campus or through agreements with local organizations, with the University of Maine at Farmington (UMF) and the University of Maine at Presque Isle (UMPI) the only NCAA schools in the state without turf fields. Among UMF's and UMPI's in-state conference competitors, Maine Maritime Academy, Husson University, and Thomas College have all had turf fields for more than a decade.

Currently, the lack of turf fields challenges these small institutions' student recruitment and retention efforts, threatening the sustainability of these rural public universities. Additionally, the teams often have to play their "home" games on the road because of the condition of their own fields, with UMPI teams traveling as far south as Bangor for some home games and UMF often traveling to Waterville. This has real environmental and cost impacts. As a result, both UMF and UMPI have turf field installation projects in their five-year master plans, though funding has not yet been secured.

Like this bill's supporters, **Maine's public universities are deeply committed to protecting and promoting public and environmental health. Through the R1 UMaine, we are proud to lead the nation in cutting-edge research and innovation to understand and mitigate PFAS exposure.** However, if passed as proposed, **LD 1177 would unnecessarily put Maine institutions like ours at a competitive disadvantage in recruiting and retaining student-athletes,** undermine physical health and wellbeing by reducing access to competitive and noncompetitive athletics, and cost UMaine at least \$85,000 just to redesign the safe turf soccer field project. It would also delay the replacement of older turf products with new, safe turf alternatives for at least three years.

Synthetic turf expands access to year-round athletic opportunities, lowers maintenance costs, and can be safe. As you know, there is already an existing law that will prevent the sale of turf products containing PFAS as of January 2029. In the meantime, **if institutions like UMS universities can demonstrate the safety of the turf we are installing, consistent with that prospective prohibition, there is no reason we should be prematurely banned from utilizing this beneficial product.** We urge you to reject LD 1177 or provide a reasonable exemption process.

Thank you for your ongoing support of the University of Maine System and I welcome your questions.