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April 9, 2025

Senator Denise Tepler
Representative Vicki Doudera
Joint Standing Committee on Environment
and Natural Resources

**RE: Maine Independent Colleges Association 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**

Dear Senator Tepler and Representative Doudera:

I represent the Maine Independent Colleges Association (MICA) and testify today against LD 1177.

MICA represents 11 independent, nonprofit colleges and universities¹ throughout Maine that serve over 32,630 students, over 7,000 of whom are from Maine. These institutions are located in municipalities of all sizes across the State, from Maine's largest city to small tourist towns and farming communities. While they share the attributes of being independent and nonprofit, these institutions are highly diverse and serve very different aspects of the needs of Maine people. Collectively, the 11 institutions are an economic engine and an integral part of Maine's Higher Educational eco-system, as well as an important part of the Maine economy. Together they:

- Directly employ over 7,180 Maine workers.
- Support 14,300 jobs for Maine workers (both direct and indirect) with earnings in excess of \$632 million.
- Operating expenditures of over \$979 million.
- Capital expenditures of over \$200 million
- Have an estimated economic impact on Maine's economy of over \$2 billion each year.
- Generated \$51,839,000 in total taxes for state and local governments.
- Contribute over \$24 million in local community service.
- Provide over \$72 million in financial aid to Maine students.

¹ Bates College, Bowdoin College, Colby College, College of the Atlantic, Husson University, Maine College of Art, Roux Institute at Northeastern University, St. Joseph's College of Maine, Thomas College, Unity College, and University of New England.

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- Provide access to facilities in all of their communities
- Draw nearly 300,000 visitors to our state each year

LD 1177 places a moratorium on all synthetic turf, not just on turf with intentionally added PFAS, which will be prohibited for sale in Maine, beginning next year. Unfortunately, this moratorium is not based in sound science and will disadvantage our colleges and universities, especially, as they compete with schools to the South, which can utilize natural grass surfaces, as well as turf fields.

MICA higher education institutions are dedicated to promoting the health, safety, and well-being of our students, faculty, and staff. We believe that the proposed moratorium on synthetic turf is misguided and would have significant negative impacts on our institutions and the communities we serve. Existing synthetic turf fields represent a significant investment by an institution, town, or school system that must be maintained for athlete safety.

Most MICA colleges and universities now have turf fields, as they are durable, cost-effective, flexible, and environmentally sustainable, especially in our northern New England climate. Several schools are in the process of installing new turf fields, including Bates. Bates added a turf field for Baseball this past fall, and they have started the DEP process for the softball field.

Other colleges, like Bowdoin have painstakingly researched safe non-PFAS turf options for their fields, gone through the DEP process, and installed these fields. In 2023, Bowdoin installed three FieldTurf synthetic turf fields, which have provided year-round access for competitive and recreational activities to students and the local community. Leading turf manufacturers for NCAA playing fields provided the College with assurances and lab results as evidence that no PFAS was added through their vertically integrated supply chain. Bowdoin undertook an independent lab analysis to confirm the absence of PFAS in the turf materials before their installation.²

Leading turf manufacturers have already pivoted away from using PFAS in their products to comply with Maine's "no added PFAS" law for turf products well ahead of the law's deadline. Additionally, advances such as the use of EPDM infill, which was used for the Bowdoin fields, provide a safe alternative to reused rubber infill products that dominated the early years of the field turf industry.

A moratorium on reinstallation introduces significant risks to student-athletes and community members as fields beyond their manufacturer warranty (typically 8 to 10 years) can become less consistent and reliable during use. Certain field areas, such as goal creases, batter's boxes, and pitching mounds, which see heavy wear and tear, need routine replacement to ensure safe use.

² Bowdoin would be happy to share the results of those tests.

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If the schools are not able to install, fix, or update these fields going forward because the Legislature has declared a moratorium and directed a study, not based on any definitive research, then our students and schools will be at a huge diadvantage. Replacing these fields with natural grass would pose a significant financial burden, diverting funds from other critical areas such as academic programs, student services, and financial aid. This would also disrupt the operation of the athletic programs and community use.

Finally, if this resolve were to pass (hopefully without a moratorium), we would suggest that this study does a similar investigation into every chemical treatment of natural grass fields.

In conclusion, we urge you to reconsider the proposed moratorium on all synthetic turf. The benefits of synthetic turf outweigh the perceived drawbacks, and a moratorium would have far-reaching negative consequences for our colleges and universities, as well as the broader community.

Sincerely,

Daniel W. Walker

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