

**Testimony in support of H5340: Department of Environmental Management,**

Dr. Hans Scholl, 71 Fales Avenue, Barrington, RI 02806

Date of Hearing: February 27, 2025

To Chair Bennett and the honorable Members of the House Environment and Natural Resources Committee:

While artificial turf (AT) is widely used in RI, a growing controversy has developed about the significant downsides of AT compared to natural grass playing fields—as recently seen in the intense debates around Burrillville’s and Barrington’s plans to install AT, close to drinking water wells or in a flood zone, and against the explicit advice of the RI DoH and DEM<sup>1</sup>.

The proponents of AT emphasize relative ease of maintenance and that AT allows for more intensive use, needing no recovery time between uses. They also claim that our sports teams would suffer a competitive disadvantage from not being able to practice on AT, compared to competing teams that are used to AT.

The opponents of AT point to its health concerns because of AT-specific injuries, heat stroke risks, antibiotics exposure from the frequent sanitizing of the AT fields, and exposure of the players to the “forever-chemicals” per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) that are contained in AT. They also point to environmental concerns: PFAS and other chemicals, and the antibiotics from sanitizing AT fields are leaching into the environment and pollute drinking water in downstream aquifers and wells. In-fill and AT-“grass” blades are getting into wetlands, streams, Narragansett Bay and oceans and, ultimately increase pollution with micro-plastics.

The opponents question that it is necessary to cover and pollute our environment with large areas of AT that usually needs to be replaced within less than ten years, ending up in landfills because comprehensive recycling of AT at scale has never been demonstrated, while natural grass is a proven alternative that has been used for playing fields for more than a hundred years without comparable harm.

In this context, it is prudent to know where and to what extent AT has been installed in Rhode Island, to know about the detailed composition of its materials, and to track its fate when it is being moved, or disposed of. This is even more important because we go into transitioning away from PFAS. PFAS concentrations in products, including AT, and PFAS exposure limits are likely to be even more tightened in the future, which makes it critical to know the locations of PFAS-containing AT in the State.

I support H5340 because it satisfies these needs and provides the requirements to establish a chain of custody for AT, with the least amount of burden to the involved parties.

Please bring the bill to a vote in 2025.

Thank you very much for considering my input, and thank you to Representative Boylan for introducing this important bill.



Dr. Hans Scholl

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<sup>1</sup> [Letter of the RI DoH and DEM to the Burrillville Town Council, dated August 15, 2024](#)