



Montgomery County Sierra Club
PO Box 4024
Rockville, MD 20849

For Immediate Release
April 20, 2026

Contact: Darian Unger, Chair, Executive Committee, Montgomery County, MD
(301) 741-5634; sierraclubmoco@gmail.com

Montgomery County Sierra Club Expresses Disappointment with Fani-Gonzalez and Sayles Flip-Flop on Artificial Turf and Releases Questionnaire Responses

(Montgomery County, MD) Today the Montgomery County Sierra Club announced its disappointment in the votes of two of our endorsed County Council candidates.

On Tuesday, April 14th, 2026, Councilmembers Natali Fani-Gonzalez (District 6) and Laurie-Ann Sayles (At-Large) voted to allocate tens of millions of dollars in capital funds toward plastic artificial turf fields, breaking promises made in their interviews and endorsement questionnaire responses.

"Actions speak louder than words." says Darian Unger, chair of the Montgomery County Executive Committee. "Both of these councilmembers received the Sierra Club endorsement for their re-election candidacies based on their records, their interviews, and their answers to our questionnaire on environmental and public health issues. It is disappointing that they not only voted against public health and safety, but also misled the Sierra Club about their positions on artificial turf."

Last Fall, the Sierra Club's questionnaire asked candidates the following question:

"The Sierra Club is concerned about the environmental, health and fiscal impacts of converting grass playing fields to artificial (synthetic) turf. Will you advocate for a moratorium on new artificial turf including at MCPS facilities?"

Fani-Gonzalez' response: *"In strong agreement with everything. I'm a strong natural grass advocate."*

Sayles response: *“Yes, I support a moratorium on new artificial turf, including at MCPS facilities, to prevent environmental, health, and fiscal impacts/liabilities associated with synthetic fields.”*

As a first step, the Montgomery County Sierra Club is releasing the full questionnaire responses of both candidates. Questionnaire responses are normally confidential but candidates were informed the Sierra Club reserves the right to make the document public should their stated positions directly contradict submitted answers during the campaign or after taking office.

[Link to Natali Fani-Gonzalez’ full set of questionnaire responses](#)

[Link to Laurie-Ann Sayles’ full set of questionnaire responses](#)

Subsequent actions could include rescinding of the endorsement should an endorsed candidate continue to take actions contrary to their questionnaire and interview answers.

* * *

Before each election, dedicated Sierra Club volunteers evaluate candidates through research, comprehensive questionnaires, and personal interviews. While there may be differences on a few specific issues, we believe these endorsed candidates are fundamentally committed to working with us to address climate change and improve our environment.

The Montgomery County Sierra Club endorses candidates for local government offices. Volunteers contact voters urging them to support candidates who will protect and improve the environment.

<https://www.sierraclub.org/maryland>

Sierra Club's Rationale for Opposing the use of Artificial Turf over Natural Grass Fields

1. User Health and Safety: Increased chances of heat-related illness, noncontact lower extremity issues, and skin problems.
2. Dangers posed to humans from plastic: plastic fields are manufactured with forever chemicals (PFAS), and the microplastics found in these fields are known endocrine disruptors.
3. Environmental impact: Natural grass is a carbon sink. Plastic fields leak toxins and PFAS directly into our streams. Plastic fields create carbon dioxide during manufacturing and cause serious long term pollution upon disposal. A football field uses 20 tons of plastic blades, and 200 tons of infill every 8 to 10 years. It is unknown where the used plastic field carpets go.
4. Cost: A plastic field costs \$2.75 to 3.75 million per field. The higher price includes mitigation for environmental degradation. High quality natural grass fields cost \$600,000. Even with the maintenance and water use the cost of the natural grass field is still considerably less than half.
5. Access and community benefit: A natural grass field is healthier for everyone and provides equal access and use if maintained. The University of Maryland has a turf grass facility, the Soccer Plex has over 50 acres of natural grass fields and can also share their expertise.
6. The Montgomery County Public School PTAs overwhelmingly support natural grass. The Montgomery County Public School Student Climate Action Council's 2024 Report on Artificial Turf also recommends natural grass over plastic fields.