



**Senate Bill 433/House Bill 450 – Soccer Opportunities Program Established
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee, February 28, 2024, 1 PM
Position: Favorable**

The Maryland Out of School Time Network (MOST) is a statewide organization dedicated to closing opportunity gaps by expanding both the quantity and quality of afterschool and summer learning opportunities for school-aged young people. MOST serves as the backbone organization for the Maryland Coalition for Community Schools. The Maryland Coalition for Community Schools, founded in 2016, advocates for student and family success by leading the charge to expand the Community School Model in Maryland. The Maryland Education Coalition (MEC) advocates for adequate funding, equitable policies, and transparent accountability statewide.

MOST, MD4CS, and MEC submit this testimony to support Senate Bill 433, which aims to establish a non-lapsing grant program to enhance access to soccer for under-served student populations in Maryland. Soccer is the number one sport in the world, and it has become increasingly popular in Maryland and across the United States, with the upcoming 2026 World Cup further fueling interest in the sport.

Participation in sports, especially when coupled with positive youth development practices, offers numerous benefits, including improved physical and emotional health, the development of prosocial skills, increased school day attendance, and a positive impact on academic performance. Recognizing these advantages, providing young people with early and developmental exposure to soccer is crucial, offering them a chance to experience the sport and its positive impacts.

However, one significant barrier to accessing popular sports like soccer is often economic. Many families, particularly those in under-served communities, face challenges in affording participation fees and acquiring necessary equipment. The Maryland Youth Soccer Association's Let's Play program serves as an exemplary model by providing free access to youth development-focused sports programs, including necessary equipment. Partnering with Maryland's community schools, MYSA has successfully expanded soccer's reach to new audiences, making the sport more accessible.

Senate Bill 433 proposes creating a new non-lapsing grant program, a crucial step in leveling the playing field and bringing soccer to more under-served student populations. By allocating resources to this grant program, we can ensure that financial constraints do not hinder the participation of aspiring young athletes. MOST encourages MSDE to include requirements in future grant applications that ensure recipients design programs inclusive of students of all abilities. We respectfully urge the committee to provide a favorable report for Senate Bill 433. Furthermore, we hope that the appropriation for the grant program will grow over time and be reassessed based on the demand it generates.

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