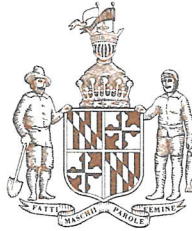


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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Senate Bill 433 – State Department of Education –
Soccer Opportunities Program - Establishment**

February 28, 2024

Mister Chairman and Members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee:

Research shows, as you would expect, that participation in sports promotes improved physical health in children. But research has also shown that children who participate in team sports have shown improved cognitive skills and improved academic achievement, including grades and standardized test scores. Further, sports activity can improve attitudes and academic behavior, including enhanced concentration, attention, and improved classroom behavior. Through friendly competition, teamwork, and physical activity, kids have the opportunity to learn new skills, develop self-confidence, build character, and so much more.

Unfortunately, access to team sports is often inaccessible for some children especially those in low-income families. A Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study found that 70 percent of children from families with incomes above about \$105,000 participated in sports in 2020. But participation was around 51 percent for families in a middle-income range, and just 31 percent for families at or below the poverty line.

Soccer is the number one team sport in the world and its popularity in the United States and Maryland continues to grow. But playing soccer costs money. There are costs for uniforms, equipment, entrance fees and travel making it difficult, if not impossible for some children to participate.

Senate Bill 882 will create a grant program to increase opportunities for minority and low-income students to participate in soccer programs. Similar to the Lacrosse Opportunities Program that was passed in 2017, this legislation will provide grants to soccer programs who at least 50% of their participants are minority or eligible for free lunch under the National School Lunch Program.

All of our state's children should be able to gain the benefits of playing a team sport. This legislation will help remove some of the financial barriers to participation and so I respectfully request a favorable report on Senate Bill 433 with amendments.