



February 28, 2024

SB433- State Department of Education- Soccer Opportunities Program- Establishment

**SUPPORT**

Senator Brian Feldman  
Chairman  
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
2 West  
Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Senator Cheryl Kagan  
Vice- Chair  
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
2 West  
Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chairman Feldman and Vice- Chair Kagan:

I am writing to support **SB 433- State Department of Education- Soccer Opportunities Program- Establishment**. Thank you Senator King for agreeing to sponsor this bill. As an avid soccer player who had the privilege to play the “beautiful game” overseas starting at the age of seven and continuing to present time (thank you Montgomery County Department of Recreation Adult 55+ Soccer League) and managing, coaching and refereeing youth and adult soccer, I am in full support of SB 433. I understand the challenges many in the African- American community face in playing soccer, especially at the higher competitive levels.

While soccer or futbol is a common person’s sport globally, only in the United States is the sport almost reserved for those with financial means, access to decent facilities and knowledge of the political skills to navigate from youth soccer to club soccer, travel soccer, the Olympic Development Team, Major League Soccer Development Academies, College D1 teams and if

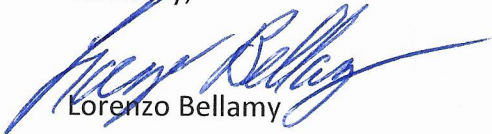
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fortunate, clubs in Europe. African-Americans and Hispanics- Americans are underrepresented in American soccer.<sup>1</sup>

And while financial constraints may be a significant obstacle to attracting young black and brown youth to the game, I acknowledge that there is a belief and perception, especially among many African- American youth, that you cannot make a living playing soccer and command the salaries of professional football and basketball players. The latter is true and only a few star soccer players will ever see the fortunes when compared to football and basketball. However, having the opportunity to play a team sport like soccer helps not only with physical development, but improves the overall health of youth and presents yet another aspirational opportunity to develop athletic skills that could translate into at best, a lucrative soccer career and at worst, exposure to a team sport that can open so many other opportunities, including educational.

SB 433 is an attempt to provide a pathway for youth desirous to play soccer, but who may not have the necessary financial support to participate. I am pleased and encouraged to see Maryland legislators continue to recognize the need to support youth sports, particularly, soccer. Playing soccer changed my life and for many in my family including my two daughters (one played on her college team) and a cousin who was just drafted in the first round by the Colorado Rapids in Major League Soccer. Soccer is Life. I urge a FAVORABLE REPORT on SB 433.

Sincerely,



Lorenzo Bellamy

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<sup>1</sup> Per the [NCCAA Race and Demographic Database](#), 7 percent of Division I women' soccer players are Black, and the most common ethnicity among professional soccer players is White, which makes up 72.8% of all professional soccer players. Comparatively, 8.9% of professional soccer players are Black or African American and 7.5% are Hispanic or Latino. <https://www.zippia.com/professional-soccer-player-jobs/demographic>