

Janeese Lewis George
Councilmember Janeese Lewis George

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5 A PROPOSED RESOLUTION
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8 IN THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
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13 To declare the existence of an emergency with respect to the need to require that the Department
14 of General Services install a natural grass field at Lafayette Elementary School.

15 RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, That this resolution
16 may be cited as the “Lafayette Elementary School Grass Field Emergency Declaration
17 Resolution of 2024”.

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19 Sec. 2. From 2015-2016, the Department of General Services (“DGS”) engaged in a school
20 modernization project at Lafayette Elementary School, located at 5701 Broad Branch Road NW in
21 Ward 4. During the modernization project, Lafayette students and staff were moved to a modular
22 swing space constructed on the school’s athletic field (“lower field”), and utilized the adjacent
23 Department of Parks and Recreation (“DPR”) Lafayette-Pointer Park field (“upper field”) for
24 school activities. The school’s use of these fields during the modernization project was expected to
25 cause significant degradation, and the project included plans for DGS to repair the damage and
26 alleviate any issues with stormwater runoff between the fields. In the public engagement process
27 for the modernization project, DGS, DC Public Schools (“DCPS”), and DPR repeatedly committed
28 to full restoration of both the upper and lower fields as natural grass fields.

29 However, the issues with drainage and stormwater runoff have persisted since the
30 conclusion of the modernization project, causing significant erosion problems throughout the park

31 and school property, as well as for neighboring streets. DGS has also not provided regular or
32 sufficient maintenance of the field to support its health. In 2023, DGS visited the site and
33 committed to remediating the problem with the Lafayette-Pointer Water Mitigation and Field
34 Replacement Project.

35 On March 13, 2024, DGS and DCPS announced their decision to replace the grass lower
36 field at Lafayette Elementary with a synthetic turf field. Unfortunately, this decision was made
37 without first engaging or even informing the community, counter to Section 4(h) of the Safe Fields
38 and Playgrounds Act of 2018 (D.C. Code § 10-171.03(h)) which requires that prior to replacement
39 of any public field or playground surface, DGS must conduct community outreach to explain the
40 available options for replacement, obtain input on the materials to be used, and explain the factors
41 impacting the decision. Although the Mayor began hosting walk throughs for the Lafayette-Pointer
42 Water Mitigation and Field Remediation Project in July 2023, the community first heard that DGS
43 was considering a synthetic turf field when it was briefly mentioned at the January 2024 ANC 3/4G
44 meeting. Despite repeated calls from stakeholders for more transparency – including from ANC
45 3/4G and the Ward 4 Council office – the field redevelopment plans were not publicly shared until
46 a community meeting on March 13th, and by then the choice to use synthetic turf appears to have
47 been already decided.

48 Not only does DGS’ and DCPS’ failure to gather community input prior to making the
49 decision to replace the field with synthetic materials violate the public trust, it also reneges on
50 specific commitments made during the modernization project to maintain a grass field at Lafayette
51 Elementary. These commitments, and the agencies’ failure to engage the community, are detailed
52 in two ANC 3/4G resolutions titled Lafayette Field Resolution February 26, 2024, and Lafayette

53 Field Resolution March 25, 2024.

54 Synthetic turf also raises significant health and environmental concerns. Nationwide, there
55 are growing concerns about the health risks of exposing children to PFAS, also called ‘forever
56 chemicals,’ which are often used in the production of synthetic materials for artificial turf fields.
57 According to the EPA, “the more we learn about PFAS chemicals, the more we learn that certain
58 PFAS can cause health risks even at very low levels. This is why anything we can do to reduce
59 PFAS in water, soil, and air, can have a meaningful impact on health”. In response to the
60 prevalence of PFAS chemicals in synthetic turf materials, the city of Boston banned the installation
61 of any new artificial turf fields in 2022. Community members have also raised concerns about the
62 use of synthetic turf fields during the summer, when the artificial materials can become
63 dangerously hot. Over 450 members of the community have signed a change.org petition detailing
64 these concerns, and calling for DGS and DCPS to honor their previous commitments to maintain a
65 grass field at Lafayette Elementary.

66 Community engagement and input is the cornerstone of responsible governance, and it is
67 essential that DGS and DCPS do not skip this part of the process; this is especially urgent when it
68 concerns decisions that may impact the health and safety of our children. Therefore, the Council
69 must act to prevent the agencies from installing a synthetic turf field over the strong objections
70 from the community, and instead require that the remediation project continue with the installation
71 of a natural grass field at Lafayette Elementary.

72 Sec. 3. The Council of the District of Columbia determines that the circumstances
73 enumerated in section 2 constitute emergency circumstances making it necessary that the
74 Lafayette Elementary School Grass Field Emergency Amendment Act of 2024 be adopted after

75 a single reading.

76 Sec. 4. This resolution shall take effect immediately.

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5 A BILL
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9 IN THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
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13 To amend, on an emergency basis, the Safe Fields and Playgrounds Act of 2018 to require that
14 the Department of General Services install a natural grass field at Lafayette Elementary
15 School.
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17 BE IT ENACTED BY THE COUNCIL DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, That this act may
18 be cited as the “Lafayette Elementary School Grass Field Emergency Amendment Act of 2024”.

19 Sec. 2. Section 4 of the Safe Fields and Playgrounds Act of 2018, effective April 11,
20 2019 (D.C. Law 22-293; D.C. Official Code § 10-171.03), is amended by adding a new
21 subsection (i) to read as follows:

22 “(i) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, DGS shall install a natural grass field at
23 Lafayette Elementary School, located in Lot 12 in Square 2012.”.

24 Sec. 3. Fiscal impact statement.

25 The Council adopts the fiscal impact statement of the Budget Director as the fiscal impact
26 statement required by section 4a of the General Legislative Procedures Act of 1975, approved
27 October 16, 2006 (120 Stat. 2038; D.C. Official Code § 1-301.47a).

28 Sec. 4. Effective date.

29 This act shall take effect following approval by the Mayor (or in the event of veto by the
30 Mayor, action by the Council to override the veto), and shall remain in effect for no longer than
31 90 days, as provided for emergency acts of the Council of the District of Columbia in section

- 32 412(a) of the District of Columbia Home Rule Act, approved December 24, 1973 (87 Stat. 788;
- 33 D.C. Official Code § 1-204.12(a)).