



POSITION: **FAVORABLE**

Maryland Native Plants Program, HB 950
Environment and Transportation Committee, March 3, 2023
Testimony of Amanda Wray, WildOnes Greater Baltimore

Chair Barve, Vice-Chair Stein, and Honorable Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee,

I am submitting this testimony as president of WildOnes Greater Baltimore. We are part of the national group, WildOnes, which has supported native plant landscaping education for its members throughout the country for more than 30 years. We strongly SUPPORT this bill to support native plant labeling to make it easier for nursery customers to locate and purchase beneficial native plants for their gardens.

Research has shown that restoring native plants to our landscapes to promote biodiversity helps native wildlife to survive [*see reference to PNAS below*]. Sadly, much of our urban landscapes now consist of non-native/exotic plants—many of which have escaped into the wild to become invasive. Gardeners are at the mercy of what their local garden center provides, and typically have to hunt for the few straight species (naturally occurring) native plant selections available. Customers are often directed to non-native choices by nursery staff. Retail inventory is often scattered amongst branded non-natives, without a dedicated section, and staff may have little knowledge of natives. I recently spoke with a staff member of my local nursery who was not able to demonstrate basic knowledge of native plants, and indicated he often recommended certain invasive plants because he did not know what native plants to recommend instead. He said he would like to have this information.

Commercially branded names like “Proven Winners” are designed to attract the attention of customers with appealing colors and imagery on their tags and pots, in this case, these tags create an increase in sales by 5 to 1 [*see Effects of Labeling reference below*]. These tags on non-native varieties of plants lure customers into a purchase that may appear to be beneficial.

In actuality, the real “proven winner” is a locally grown native plant that has already proven itself by having evolved for millennia to be perfectly adapted for our local conditions. This means that it will do well for the gardener, while also helping the ecosystem survive in our critically important Chesapeake Bay Watershed region. Gardens centers can also be more confident in ordering more native plants if they see a similar uptick in purchases from native plants with more eye-catching tags, stickers or

branded pots.

Native plants provide an ecologically important role of supporting native insects, which provide an essential food source to birds and, in turn, larger fauna. Non-native plants cannot support the growth and development of native insect populations in the same way as natives that provide habitat, sustenance and support to the very ecosystems we rely on for our own survival. Gardeners are inadvertently damaging their own ecosystems via purchases made at nurseries they are trusting to sell them beneficial plants.

When I was trimming seed heads from a highly invasive Chinese Fountaingrass plant on my nextdoor neighbor's property (with his permission), another neighbor came by and asked me a very pertinent question: "If these plants are invasive, why are the nurseries selling them to us"? This is a larger question for another time. For the purposes of this legislation, if we could just give our beneficial native plants more visibility on the shelves so they are easier to find, we could go a long way to helping our ecosystems recover from the many years of destruction we have thrust upon it.

We ask for a FAVORABLE report for SB836/HB950, which will bring attention to straight species native plants that are so essential for keeping our ecosystems functional and robust. The more native plants we can restore to our local backyards and larger landscapes, will help sustain wildlife that ranges throughout the critically important Chesapeake Bay Watershed region.

Resources for further reading:

Effects of Labeling: "Recent consumer research shows that gardeners choose Proven Winners® at a rate of 5-to-1 when sold in the white branded containers, with accompanying P.O.P display." and "On a retail sales level, Proven Winners and Proven Selections sales are greater than a half-billion dollars annually."

SOURCES: <https://pwfourstar.com/retailers> and https://www.provenwinners.com/Professionals/Complete_Package and <https://www.provenwinners.com/why-proven-winners/company-background>

Benefits of Native Plants: "Properties landscaped with nonnative plants function as population sinks for insectivorous birds. To promote sustainable food webs, urban planners and private landowners should prioritize native plant species." SOURCE: <https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.1809259115>

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