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The Maryland House of Delegates
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**Margie Brassil - Legislative Director to Delegate Dana Stein –
Testimony in Support of
HB 950 - Maryland Native Plants Program**

Chairman Barve and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee

In 2010, my husband and I decided to transform our front yard—mostly then weed-filled grass—into a native garden. A friend and neighbor, who is a much better gardener than I was, developed the design and chose many of the plants. She was then, and still is, very passionate about the environment and about planting natives.

Slide 2: This is half of my front garden in Spring.

Slide 3: This is the other half of my garden in mid-Summer.

I want to focus on a few plants in my Native Garden to explain why this bill is so important.

Note in Slide 3 the composition of these plants: Maryland’s own Black-Eyed Susan, interspersed with Yarrow that has a yellow/orange color, and a bright reddish-orange Echinacea is behind them.

Slide 4: A slightly blurry closeup of the Echinacea in slide 3, with a commercial description of the plant. I bought it because it looked great with the Yarrow and Black-Eyed Susan and because of the description—I wanted pollinator friendly plants. However, as I’ve since learned, “Hot Papaya” is an Echinacea hybrid that produces no seeds for birds to eat, and I haven’t seen a single bee or butterfly on the plant in the 12 years I’ve had it. It’s just pretty.

Slide 5: The photo on the left is another closeup from Slide 3 showing the Terracotta Yarrow I planted. Turns out, it is also not a Maryland native, but it may be a nativar—a cultivar produced from a native plant. It attracts a great variety of bees, so not a total loss like the Hot Papaya. On the right is a photo of Common Yarrow—not from my garden--which I’ve seen on some lists as being native to Maryland. On the other hand, the University of Maryland Extension (UME) classifies it as a weed.

I could go on to point out what is native and what is either a cultivar or hybrid in my garden, but I hope you get the point. I wanted a native garden. Thirteen years ago, there were no good lists of what is or isn’t native in Maryland. We thought since Echinacea was native, the Hot Papaya

version would be fine. Today, there are lists of native plants on a variety of websites, but they aren't necessarily helpful or complete, nor are all plants on these lists available to purchase in a local Maryland nursery. Many of my garden plants were bought online from out-of-state nurseries because it was just so difficult to find them in Maryland. Believe me, I would much rather have bought them locally.

The other witnesses on this bill will provide more detail about other aspects of this bill. Let me explain how this bill will help home gardeners like me who are not Master Gardeners.

1. The creation of a "Commercial Native Plant List" that would be available on a dedicated UME "Maryland Native Plants" webpage, on the Department of Agriculture's Maryland's Best website, with a link posted on the Department of Natural Resources native plants website. Consumers will finally have easy access to a list of verified Maryland Native plants.
2. The Department of Agriculture will create a voluntary certification program of growers and retailers who sell plants that are on the Commercial Native Plant List. A list of these growers and retailers will also be available on the UME's Maryland Native Plants webpage as well as on MDA's Maryland's Best website. This certification program will help gardeners like me find local nurseries and growers—not online ones—that are selling the plants we are looking for.

The marketing and educational aspects of this bill are very important. The more gardeners understand the importance of including native plants in their gardens, the more growers will grow natives and retailers will sell natives. Gardeners will buy locally if they know where native plants are available.

One last note: HB 950 will have amendments requested by UME that clarifies their role as providing education and research in support of the Native Plant Program.

I hope you will support this bill.