

March 4, 2024

**Testimony:** SB915, Agriculture - Invasive Plant Species - Regulation

**Committee:** Education, Energy, and the Environment

**Hearing Date:** March 5, 2024

**Position:** Favorable

Dear Honorable Chairs:

I strongly support SB915 *Agriculture - Invasive Plant Species – Regulation* and request that the committee provide a favorable report on the bill. As a professor of invasion ecology at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, I am an expert on risk assessment of invasive plants. I also lead the Northeast Regional Invasive Species and Climate Change (RISCC) Network, which was founded in 2016 and aims to reduce the compounding effects of invasive species and climate change by building stronger communities of researchers and practitioners across the Northeast region (including the state of Maryland). This combination of expertise gives me unique understanding of both the science and practice of invasive species management. State regulations that work to stop the ongoing propagation of known invasive plants, like SB915, are a critical first step towards effective, proactive prevention of invasions.

A recent report on non-native invasive species estimated that these species cost the global economy hundreds of billions of dollars each year associated with losses of ecosystem services and agricultural productivity (Roy et al. 2023). Those same invasive species also cause declines in native species and biodiversity (Bradley et al. 2019). Thus, it is imperative that states have regulations to prevent the introduction and spread of known invasive plants.

State regulation of invasive plants is critical because the vast majority of invasive plants are introduced as ornamental plants via the horticulture trade (Reichard & White 2001). Although the ornamental pathway to plant invasion has been well-described for decades, state policies to prohibit invasive plant sales lag far behind. Weak or absent policies in many states lead to the regulation of only a small fraction of known invasive plants (Beaury et al. 2021a). Weak state policies further create a patchwork of invasive plant regulation that can be readily exploited by retailers and online marketplaces, leading to ineffective prevention of invasions. The end result is that over 60% of invasive plants (species that are well-known to be ecologically and economically harmful) are still available for sale across the U.S. (Beaury et al. 2021b).

In addition to the current pool of invasive plants, Maryland is also a hotspot for future plant invasion. With climate change, an increasing number of southerly invasive species will expand their ranges northward, creating additional challenges for managers who will be confronted with a new set of species – often ones that are already part of the ornamental plant trade (Beaury et al. 2023). Yet, these range-shifting invasive species also create an opportunity for success. Stopping an invasive species from being introduced is the only sure means of preventing the ecological and economic damages caused by invasion. Preventing invasions can only be done with effective legislation aimed at stopping the ongoing propagation and sale of invasive plants.

For these reasons, I strongly urge a favorable report on SB915.

Sincerely,



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#### Citations

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- Reichard SH, White P. 2001. Horticulture as a Pathway of Invasive Plant Introductions in the United States: Most invasive plants have been introduced for horticultural use by nurseries, botanical gardens, and individuals. *BioScience*. 51(2):103–13
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