



Harper's Choice CARES

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Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment
Testimony on: SB915 “Agriculture - Invasive Plant Species - Regulation (Biodiversity and Agriculture Protection Act)”

Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: March 5, 2024

I write to lend my support for [SB915](#). I believe that the bill is sound; provides a clear path to measurably improving the natural environment in the State of Maryland, and the watershed we share with many other states and flora and fauna too.

I am an [assistant professor of library and information science](#) at the University of Maryland College Park. I have ten years of experience working to build and improve citizen science and public participation platforms such as Zooniverse.org and By the People at the Library of Congress. These platforms invite volunteers to donate their time to further human knowledge in many forms. I am also a citizen scientist and volunteer in my own time, serving as a ‘Weed Warrior’ in my village in Columbia, MD, and a founding member and advisory board member for the Harper’s Choice village Climate Action Research and Education group.¹

Along with passionate neighbors and volunteers from Columbia and neighboring communities, I spend hundreds of hours every year removing invasive plants in my area and teaching people how to do the same. We remove invasive plants such as English ivy, Japanese Barberry, Multiflora rose, Amur honeysuckle, lesser celandine and many of the plants listed in this bill. Together, my fellow ‘Weed Warriors’, Master Gardeners, Watershed Stewards and others spend thousands of hours voluntarily undertaking education, and in-the-field work to battle the plants that are eroding the natural environment and literally causing the death of thousands of native

¹ <https://columbiaassociation.org/news/your-guide-to-cas-weed-warriors/> ; <https://columbiaassociation.org/open-space/cas-adopt-a-spot-program-helping-columbias-ecosystem-thrive/>

plants, animals, and insects by displacing the vital food sources they (and we) all require to thrive or indeed just survive.²

Every time we tackle a spot of land and rehabilitate it by removing invasives and planting natives, I see the positive impacts within a year to 18 months. Volunteer native goldenrods, viburnum, hollies and oaks sprout up where vinca, English ivy and winged euonymus previously choked the earth. With these returns we see native insects return, and improved health in other species that rely on them—especially on the larva of lepidoptera (moths). These seeds are in the seed bank and waiting for the right conditions and resources to thrive.

At times the sheer weight of invasives in our environment seems overwhelming and beyond hope, but I keep pulling because I know that just as unchecked invasives lead to exponential growth (literally in the case of some species), pulling plants also checks that growth and the future generations it would lead to. **So it is galling that many of the very plants we pull are also still available for sale.** I believe that most people plant these plants with no idea of the harm they cause or the benefits that natives can render in the landscape. There are also numerous natives that perform the same functions as the invasives, and would satisfy the needs of users of residential or commercial properties and the landscapers that serve them.

Native plants are often beautiful and highly functional, just as many invasives are beautiful and highly functional in the environments in which they originated. I want to make it clear that this bill and those who advocate for native plants are doing so out of xenophobia. Rather, this is about understanding the deep and complex relationships that develop between insects, plants and animals (as well as fungi and bacteria) over millennia. These relationships are like complex games of Go or chess, in which the plants and insects or animals develop offensive and defensive moves against each other in an effort to survive. These adaptations are genetically honed over time and, until relatively recently, have evolved in relatively narrow environmental niches. These relationships easily fall out of shape when we move species to places where they did not originate. It's a new game, and the new plant, insect or animal might now have an advantage and can wreak havoc if left unchecked.

Imagine if in a game of chess your opponent could add new pieces every time you won a piece from them. That's what it feels like to be a Weed Warrior and a concerned citizen trying to pull these plants while they remain on the market. So let's change the rules and give ourselves, this land, and future generations plants and animals (ourselves included) the opportunity to play a fair game. We have a tough enough set of opponents without a constant supply of reinforcements of non-native plants.

This bill is timely. It is also overdue. Please do not delay this vital action any further. Give us all a fighting chance.

² This is one of many Tallamy books written for a general audience, but of course there is a mountain of relevant research behind his work, and cited therein. Tallamy, Douglas W. *Nature's Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation That Starts in Your Yard*. Portland, Oregon: Timber Press, 2020.

Sincerely,
Victoria Van Hying, PhD