

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

Dear Chairman Feldman and Committee Members:

I respectfully request that you produce a favorable report for the bill cited above. I am writing to you as (1) a member of the Wild Ones Nation's Capital Chapter, (2) a volunteer with the Montgomery County Weed Warrior program, (3) a retiree whose career included federal regulatory policy, and (4) a gardener.

Introduction

The environmental damage done by non-native invasive plants (NNIs) has been well documented by many reliable sources. Perhaps the most visible harm, easily seen throughout the State, is that they kill trees. It is also well documented that trees serve critical functions needed to sustain life; e.g., they reduce flooding and toxic run-off into waterways, clean air and reduce global warming by absorbing CO₂, and provide much needed habitat for a vast number of species. NNIs also out-compete native plants needed to provide shelter and food to pollinators and other native wildlife. Some unfortunately even provide especially good habitat for Lyme-carrying ticks.

NNIs spread from ornamental plantings in private and public spaces. This legislation is sorely needed to tame such spreading so that removal efforts can be successful. With only six (6) NNIs currently banned from sales in our State, we are in a woefully inadequate position to manage the destructive behavior of NNIs.

As a Member of Wild Ones Nation's Capital Chapter

The nationwide organization, "Wild Ones: Native Plants, Natural Landscapes" has chapters throughout the Country. Its purpose is to provide education and resources to promote native plant landscaping, necessary to well-functioning ecosystems. The sale of NNIs are a major barrier to this organization's work because they out-compete native plants.

As a Volunteer in the Montgomery County Weed Warrior

With only two paid staff, this is a volunteer-dependent program working to remove the most pernicious NNIs from County parks. We volunteers spend many hours cutting invasive vines that are killing trees and removing other harmful NNIs. Allowing sales of the very same NNIs calls into question our spending time doing this work.

As a Financial Professional who worked in the Regulatory Area

Now retired, my career in banking included working in the area of regulatory policy and compliance. Good regulations are needed to ensure responsible practices and create a level competitive field for businesses. Regarding NNIs, nurseries that don't sell them are put at a competitive disadvantage to those that do. Furthermore, responsible nurseries that would like to stop selling NNIs may be deterred. By banning the sale of these harmful plants, conscientious nurseries can operate within a fair market.

As a Gardener

My yard suffers from a massive amount of harmful NNIs that have spread from areas outside of my property line. I spend a lot of time and money removing them. I am profoundly demoralized when I observe them being sold in nurseries and planted by landscapers. Unfortunately, the great majority of people do not know how harmful they are.

Conclusion

You have an opportunity to address the environmental destruction caused by ongoing sales of NNIs in our State. Please keep those who volunteer in this area motivated to continue the important work by producing a favorable report on this legislation

Thank-you for considering my testimony.

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