



Maryland Forestry Foundation
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Dear Chair and members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee,

In keeping with the Maryland Forestry Foundation's mission to protect and conserve forest cover in Maryland, we fully support HB979 and SB915. Maryland's forest ecosystems are vital habitats for plant and wildlife communities, mitigate against the negative impacts of climate change, and offer recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. Invasive species threaten all of these benefits; non-native vines reduce the capacity for forests to regenerate after disturbance by killing young trees, and non-native trees and shrubs displace native vegetation necessary to support native wildlife, reducing biodiversity in these ecosystems. Dense thickets of thorny invasive shrubs can impede access to and usability of recreational trails, as well as reduce visibility and diminish scenic views.

Management of these species creates a significant but necessary burden for land managers. The continued sale of plant species known to cause environmental, ecological, and economic harm adds to that burden through the continued re-introduction of invasive species into native landscapes.

The revision of the weed risk assessment process outlined in HB979/SB915 is scientifically sound, professionally recognized, and has been demonstrated as successful in Delaware. The changes proposed in these bills will slow the continued spread of species known to be harmful and allow Maryland's regulators to more quickly and appropriately respond to the environmental threats posed by invasive species. Recognizing the importance of the horticultural industry, we support the reasonable transition time outlined in these bills to minimize impacts on trade. Adoption of these bills will support Maryland's forest owners and land managers in effectively stewarding these critical landscapes and help to safeguard the resilience of our forested ecosystems for the benefit of future generations. We hope that the committee will provide a favorable report on this important bill.

Sincerely,

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