



March 3rd, 2024

Biodiversity and Agriculture Protection Act (SB 915)

Dear Chairman Feldman and Members of the Education, Energy and Environment Committee:

Blue Water Baltimore's mission is to restore the quality of Baltimore's rivers, streams, and Harbor to foster a healthy environment, a strong economy, and thriving communities. A core part of our work is operating the Herring Run Nursery, which specializes in plants native to Maryland and the Chesapeake Bay watershed. **We write today in favor of the Biodiversity and Agriculture Protection Act (SB915).**

Our non-profit Nursery offers more than 250 native species of trees, shrubs, vines, flowers, and more to retail and wholesale customers alike. Native plants help reduce stormwater pollution entering the Chesapeake Bay by reducing nutrient runoff and requiring fewer chemical inputs than non-native plants. Native plants have deeper root systems than non-natives and are better at stabilizing soils and preventing sediment runoff. Native plants provide critical habitat and food for butterflies, birds, and pollinators. Ecosystem health is increasingly important with rising concerns over climate change and declining pollinator populations. Native plants are an integral part of a healthy and functioning ecosystem.

Since Maryland's initial invasive plant law was passed in 2011, we've only seen 6 plants prohibited from sale with another 13 on the Tier 2 list, meaning they are still permitted to be sold but must have a warning "Plant with Caution" sign. SB 915 will help broaden the invasive plants regulated by the law from only commercial terrestrial plants to terrestrial and aquatic plants, both commercial and non-commercial. In addition, it will eliminate the plant tier system, moving the current Tier 2 plants to Tier 1 (prohibited from sale). The plants on Tier 2 are just as invasive as those on Tier 1 but the "Maryland screen" did not prohibit selling any plant that had been in the state more than 50 years or was widely established.

SB 915 will support the growth of native plants and the native plant industry in Maryland. With the amount of damage from invasive plants we are seeing in our forests, parks, roadsides, and neighborhoods every day, changes in the law are needed. We urge supporting this legislation as it proposes structural changes to bring our laws more in line with the invasive plant laws in neighboring states and will allow us to address invasives that are widely established in our state.

Sincerely,

Barbara Johnson
Community Advocacy Manager
Blue Water Baltimore

BLUE WATER BALTIMORE
CLEAN WATER. STRONG COMMUNITIES.

