

Testimony urging a **FAVORABLE** report on
HB979
Agriculture – Invasive Plant Species – Regulation
(Biodiversity and Agriculture Protection Act)

Presented to the **House Environment and Transportation Committee**

House of Delegates of Maryland

Hearing: Feb, 28, 2024

From Chesapeake Natives

(Prepared by executive director Jane Henderson)

Dear Chair Korman, Vice Chair Boyce, and honorable members of the Committee,

Chesapeake Natives’ strongly supports HB979 because it will significantly strengthen Maryland’s non-native invasive plant screening system to ban some of the most harmful invasives in our state.

Recent research at the University of Massachusetts Amherst confirms what many of us have long suspected – commercial nurseries play a dominant role in seeding future invasions of destructive non-native invasive plants. “When people think of how invasive plant species spread, they might assume species are moving because of birds or the wind dispersing seeds,” says Evelyn M. Beaury, lead author of the paper. “But commercial nurseries that sell hundreds of different invasives are actually **the primary pathway of invasive plant introduction** [emphasis added].”¹ Analyzing data from a case study of 672 nurseries around the U.S. that sell a total of 89 invasive plant species, researchers found that 55% of the invasive species were sold within 13 miles of an observed invasion—the median distance people across the U.S. go to buy landscaping plants.

Beyond the impact of sales, plant nurseries stocking invasives risk them spreading in their immediate environs. As a plant grower, we see how our plants spread in the habitat surrounding our native plant nursery in Rosaryville simply because they are there.

But even the heartiest of native plants are under constant threat from invasives. In Rosaryville State Park, the biggest threats come from non-native Wisteria (*Wisteria sinensis*, *Wisteria floribunda*), Japanese stiltgrass (*Microstegium vimineum*), Wavyleaf basketgrass (*Oplismenus undulatifolius*), Kudzu (*Pueraria montana*), Empress Tree (*Paulownia tomentosa*), Oriental bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*), and English Ivy (*Hedera helix L.*). **ALL of these plants can still be sold in Maryland**, requiring the nursery to simply post a warning sign to potential buyers.²

¹ <https://www.greenhousegrower.com/management/are-nurseries-at-fault-for-spreading-invasive-species/>

² <https://mda.maryland.gov/plants-pests/Documents/Invasive-Plant-List-March-2020.pdf>

We know that biodiversity is essential to keeping our planet habitable for human beings. The complex, localized food webs that support life on earth are critically stressed as insect populations plummet. Without insects, most flowering plants and birds will go extinct as food webs collapse. As dire, the biosphere will rot without insects decomposing, leaving inhospitable bacteria and fungi to dominate. Native insects rely on native plants.

Unchecked non-native invasive species threaten native species that are essential to our local food webs. As a grower of local ecotype native species (LENS) of the Chesapeake Bay watershed, we source our seed from local, wild native habitats around the region. Plants whose provenance is local have coevolved with insects in their home ecosystem and so bloom at times best for local populations. Beyond development, non-native species invasion, spurred on by climate change, poses the greatest threat to the native habitats. Filling no niche in our food webs, invasives have the advantage that no one eats them and so can often outcompete native species. HB979 will also help to preserve LENS populations whose ongoing existence and propagation is essential to local biodiversity.

Please take action today to stop more and more invasives from becoming bigger problems for the next generation. I understand first hand inheriting a ‘legacy of invasives.’ My dear late mother, an avid gardener active in her local garden club, planted the barberry in 2007, which has steadily invaded the fields and woods surrounding our family home in Upstate New York. An outright ban of Barberry sales in the state would pass eight years later in 2015. She of course bought five bushes at a local nursery, having been sold on their decorative winter berries (which the birds help spread!). Certainly, many in horticulture already understood the invasive nature of Barberry by 2007 but that information never reached my mom. As we tackle this particularly thorny invasion, I can’t help but wish that New York’s ban had been imposed early enough to have prevented it in the first place.

Meanwhile, Barberry **continues to be sold in Maryland** with an ignorable warning sign. So it and other harmful invasive species continue to spread by sale in Maryland and to invade more and more habitat! I urge this committee to act to change this.

Please pass HB979 and send it on to the full House of Delegates.

Chesapeake Natives’s mission is to promote, protect and propagate local ecotype native species (LENS) of the Chesapeake Bay watershed. We extend an **open invitation to members of the Committee** to come and visit our nursery at historic Mt. Airy in beautiful Rosaryville State Park in Upper Marlboro to learn more about the regenerative power of natives, LENS in particular.

Respectively,
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