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February 26, 2024

SUPPORT: HB 979 - Agriculture - Invasive Plant Species - Regulation (Biodiversity and Agriculture Protection Act)

Chairman Korman and Members of the Committee:

Maryland LCV supports HB 979 - Agriculture - Invasive Plant Species - Regulation (Biodiversity and Agriculture Protection Act) and we thank Del. Foley for her leadership in addressing this growing threat to the health of our ecosystems.

Both the 2019 Global Assessment report from the United Nations and a 2020 World Wildlife Fund report, describe invasive species as one of the top five threats to biodiversity. Invasive species cause ecological and economic harm, and they also threaten human health. Maryland has experienced both the negative effects and the cost of managing invasive species. In particular, Maryland's forest ecosystems, vital for many reasons, not least of which is their contribution to the health of the Chesapeake Bay, are under threat, in large part due to invasive plant species. In 2023, a group of researchers published a study on the health of the forests in National Parks from Maine to Virginia. The study characterized the status of all of those forests in Maryland as either "imminent" or "probable" failure due to invasive plants, which block a forest's ability to naturally regenerate its tree canopy over time.¹

Additionally, ecosystems dominated by invasive plants have been found to support the spread of disease vectors, like the ticks that spread Lyme disease and other viruses of human health concern. Numerous studies of forest ecosystems dominated by two invasive shrubs, including those common in Maryland, have found where invasive shrubs are more prevalent, so too is the abundance of disease-causing ticks.

Some of those same plants wreaking havoc on our forest ecosystems are still legally offered for sale in nurseries in Maryland. HB 979 will ensure we are no longer allowing the sales of plants known to be invasive. This action is truly the least we can do as we address this environmental challenge. Additionally HB 979 establishes a system by which species can be categorized as invasive as they are discovered to have detrimental effects on native ecosystems in Maryland.

Invasive species cause ecological and economic harm to our state. Halting invasive plant sales is an important step to take in addressing the challenges they cause. Maryland LCV supports HB979 and urges a favorable report on this bill.

¹ Catherine R. Henry, Michael B. Walters, Tree species size class patterns portend compositional shifts and low resilience in managed northern hardwood forests, *Ecosphere*, 10.1002/ecs2.4621, 14, 7, (2023).