



*Habitat Stewards of Overlook Park*



February 26, 2024

**HB979 Agriculture - Invasive Plant Species - Regulation (Biodiversity and Agriculture Protection Act)**

**Environment and Transportation Committee**

**FAVORABLE**

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

As leader of Habitat Stewards of Overlook Park and as a Certified Maryland Master Naturalist, I write in support of HB979, the Biodiversity and Agriculture Protection Act. The bill will enhance the 2011 invasive plant law by allowing more species of invasive plants to be prohibited from sale, including aquatic and non-commercial invasives, updating the invasive plant assessment protocol, and calling for additional staff to enforce the law.

Two years ago, I became a certified Weed Warrior through Baltimore City Recreation and Parks (Baltimore County does not yet have such a program) and formed the volunteer group Habitat Stewards of Overlook Park to rescue the park's trees from non-native invasive vines like English Ivy, Porcelain-berry, Asiatic Bittersweet, and Japanese Honeysuckle that were girdling trunks, blocking sunlight, and weighing down branches at risk for breakage during storms. We have removed many vines and received positive feedback from park users. But volunteers alone are no match for the many invasives growing throughout the park, including on steep stream banks.

Some of the invasives in the park, like Burning Bush and Pachysandra, are commonly planted and may have invaded the park via seeds or root fragments escaping from nearby yards. Burning Bush is allowed to be sold, albeit with a warning label, as a Tier 2 invasive plant under the current law. HB979 would move the Tier 2 invasives to Tier 1, prohibiting them from sale. HB979 will help groups like ours which are valiantly working to restore native plant habitat that our native bees, butterflies, birds, and other wildlife depend on.

Uncontrolled spread of non-native invasive vines and other plants that harm our trees and habitat is not sustainable. Dead trees, strangling vines, and lack of wildlife diminish the experience of park users, including those from nearby underserved communities, who come to the park to relax and be in nature. We ask for a favorable report on HB979 to preserve the biodiversity and beauty of our state and of our public parks.

Respectfully,

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