



NATIONAL AQUARIUM®

Date: February 28, 2024

Bill: HB 979 - Biodiversity and Agriculture Protection Act

Position: Support

Dear Chair Korman and Members of the Committee:

The National Aquarium respectfully requests a favorable report for **House Bill 979 - Agriculture - Invasive Plant Species - Regulation (Biodiversity and Agriculture Protection Act)**, which will take important steps to prohibit harmful invasive plants from being propagated, purchased, or sold in Maryland.

Native plant species have grown naturally in our region for thousands of years and are well adapted to our soil conditions and our climate. Native plants help improve water quality because, unlike nonnative counterparts, they do not rely on additional watering, fertilizers and pesticides to thrive. Native plants also support local wildlife and migratory species. On the other hand, non-native and invasive plant species often lack natural controls to limit their spread and compete with native plants for available sunlight, water and nutrients. This can lead to the disappearance of native plants along with the support system they provide to local ecosystems and wildlife.

In 2011, the state of Maryland created a two-tier classification system identifying invasive plant species. In 2021, the state prohibited the use of state funds to purchase or plant invasive species. The impact of these actions was limited because since the 2011 law was passed, only 19 invasive plants have been classified under the two-tier system, and only six of those plants have been prohibited for sale in Maryland.

In 2022, the state sought to address this shortcoming by passing legislation to expand the number of plants classified as invasive species. Unfortunately, the state has had challenges implementing that law because the current assessment required to classify invasive species is time consuming and does not allow the state to keep pace with ecological threats. There are over 80 generally recognized invasive plant species in Maryland compared to the 19 invasive plants that are currently classified. This bill addresses the problem by instituting a new professionally recognized status assessment protocol for assessing whether a plant should be considered invasive in Maryland. This new assessment will reduce the amount of time it takes to classify invasive species.

HB 979 also eliminates the outdated two-tier classification system for invasive plant species. Instead, a list of prohibited plants will be developed using the new assessment protocol, which will also allow creation of a watch list for species that score below a certain threshold but should be monitored for future risk. The number of prohibited plants will more accurately reflect what species are doing the most harm in the state.

This legislation is an opportunity for Maryland to build on existing efforts to better address the environmental and economic costs of invasive species. **We urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on HB 979.**

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