

Committee: Environment and Transportation
Testimony on: HB979 – “Biodiversity and Agriculture Protection Act”
Submitted by: Meredith McDonagh for local garden clubs
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: February 28, 2024

Meredith McDonagh
710 Hampton Lane
Towson, MD 21286
meredy@comcast.net

Dear Environment and Transportation Committee,

I respectfully urge you to please support HB 979, whose purpose supports the efforts of previously enacted legislation and whose current consideration and passage will help address the overwhelming number and amount of Invasives that is continuing to “eat up” our landscape to the ultimate detriment of human beings as the critical native flora/fauna struggle to survive the tsunami of foreign plants.

I am a Baltimore County Master Gardener (8 years) and a member of Halten Garden Club, Inc. (23 years) currently serving as my club’s Conservation Chair. I am a Gardening Study Master Consultant through Federated Garden Clubs of MD. In addition, I am currently the Zone VI (MD and DC) Conservation and National Affairs and Legislation Representative with the Garden Club of America. I have had a lot of education on all sorts of environmental issues. I observe my landscape and community carefully as I move through it.

Drastic change has and is occurring on my Towson property over the past 30 years. The landscape looks very different, unhealthy, which makes me feel sad and frustrated, often defeated. I calculate that more than half of our 9 acres is covered in very aggressive Invasive plants with several that are either impossible to get rid of or near impossible. I have many types of Invasives; I will describe the three worst culprits.

Lesser Celandine (LC, *Ficaria verna*): likely washed onto our property from the stream that crosses through it. I did not plant it; I did not want it. Over the years it has marched all over the property, covering entire flower beds, under trees, in the vegetable garden and enmeshed itself in grass. It grows in all soil, light, and moisture conditions. I see it competing with, and easily “winning” over Spring native plants and any other plant material in its path. One example of collateral damage are violets (*Viola sororia*) which are host plants for a large variety (30) of fritillary butterflies, bees, flies, and food sources of pollen and nectar as well as seeds for small mammals and birds (Xerces Society). Even larger perennials are disturbed by the thick mats of Lesser Celandine that encircle and smother it, their leaves and buds deformed. This means that there is a drastic reduction in flowering plants including trilliums, claytonia spp. {Spring Beauties} and *Sanguinaria canadensis* (Bloodroot) for pollinators. Deer do not eat it. And while I wish they did, it underscores the “food desert” that occurs when invasives take most of the available real estate.

It is nearly impossible to completely eradicate LC because the bulbils and tuberous roots drop off in the soil. Three times I dug up plants, and thoroughly sifted the soil, but in just one season it was back again, and the season after that, back again with vengeance. Furthermore, I now know that I have unwittingly spread it elsewhere on my property when moving plants to a new bed. That is maddening. Thankfully this plant is Tier 1 now, but the damage here just continues, exponentially. I implore you to expand Tier 1 so that there is a chance that other invasives’ spread is curtailed.

Houttuynia cordata (HC- Chameleon Plant): I bought this out-of-control plant at a nursery. I had no idea about the nightmare that was to ensue. Furthermore, I cannot believe it is still sold and do believe this is grossly irresponsible. This plant spreads rapidly, in all growing conditions, and inserts itself among existing plants. The rhizomes break off very easily, meaning that the plant will live regardless, and the root systems thrive 18 inches below soil level so digging it out successfully is unlikely. I covered a small, infested area for 3 years with plastic. Unearthed last year, finally, the bed appeared to look okay, but I know that there is more HC in the soil, and therefore it is returning.

It is futile to use herbicides on these plants; they do not work and who wants more chemicals in our groundwater? I have spent HOURS and HOURS trying to eradicate this and much money paying someone to help remove invasives on our property (barberry, raspberry, mahonia, and more included). The cost is REALLY, REALLY, high – in terms of bio-diversity loss, money, effort. It feels like a losing battle, but legislation would help stop adding more invasives into our landscape and hopefully “cut off at the pass” newer threats before they too become out-of-control.

Japanese Stilt Grass (*Microsegium vimineum*): dominates about 3 acres of declining woods, trees fallen due to aggressive BGE “pruning” and increased rain, leaving open areas where Stilt Grass takes hold, then proceeds to invade all over the woods in short order. You cannot safely walk in the woods for fear of tripping over smothered fallen trees; I don’t how foxes and rabbits navigate this fog.

Also and even if not typically sold in nurseries, I believe the public needs more education on the detriments of **all** invasives, so they choose wisely when, say, ordering plants online across state borders, participating in plant swaps that spread invasives (often unknowingly), introducing English Ivy into a suburban garden where it then infests adjacent farm and park land (=spread by humans, not birds eating the seed).

Will the trees covered in vines along roadways and on homeowners’ properties become the recognizable/typical look of Maryland? Are they now? Trees covered in ivy and other Invasives are increasing in number and smothering larger proportions of the bio-mass, to the point of death. These areas are eyesores. They do nothing to enhance Maryland’s attraction to visitors and homebuyers, decreasing property value. Along roadways it is sickening to see a struggling Oak or River Birch (natives) choking with vines and then embellished with litter. These trees are cleaning the car fumes, holding soil, etc. and should be adding to local beauty, not to decay.

Please vote favorably on this bill to effect real change and save Marylanders the cost, both economic and health-wise, by addressing the devastation. According to Yale Climate Opinion Maps, 78% of Marylanders say ‘Yes, Climate Change is real’- and Invasives are a part of this.

Thank you, and for all you do for our environment,

Meredith McDonagh,

For and on behalf of these Garden Clubs: Amateurs, Catonsville, Chevy Chase, Twenty, Georgetown, Green Spring Valley, Guilford, Halten, Hardy, Perennial, St. Georges, Talbot County, Trowel.