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Environment and Transportation  
Committee

Chair, Non-Energy Utilities  
Subcommittee

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony:** HB35 - Local Government - Regulatory Powers - Regulation of Tree of Heaven

**Committee:** Environment and Transportation Committee

**Hearing Date:** February 4, 2026

**Position:** Favorable

Good afternoon Chair Korman, Vice Chair Guyton, and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee. For the record, I am Delegate Linda Foley and am presenting HB0035 Local Government - Regulatory Powers - Regulation of Tree of Heaven.

HB35 is enabling legislation that authorizes the governing body of a county or municipality to adopt ordinances to regulate the planting, sale and continued growth of trees of heaven, *Ailanthis altissima*. The bill also authorizes local governments to establish bounty or native tree replacement programs to incentivize the safe removal and eradication. I am introducing a sponsor amendment to broaden the scope of the bill to include all tree species on the Maryland Department of Agriculture's prohibited invasive plant list.

Invasive plants are nonnative and their introduction causes harm to human health, the environment or the economy. Most often through aggressive and unchecked spread. Tree of heaven is one of the most problematic invasive tree species in Maryland. It is a fast-growing, deciduous hardwood that spreads both through prolific seed production and extensive root suckering. A single female tree can produce hundreds of thousands of seeds each year, and even small roots fragments can generate new trees many feet away from the original trunk.

Tree of heaven severely degrades natural ecosystems by crowding out native plants with dense canopy cover and by secreting chemicals into the soil that inhibit the growth of surrounding vegetation. This reduces viable habitat for native species and undermines biodiversity across both urban and rural landscapes. Its long and aggressive root system can also damage building foundations, sidewalks and sewer infrastructure, creating costly challenges for property owners.

Compounding these impacts, tree of heaven is the preferred host plant for the spotted lanternfly, another invasive species that poses a significant economic threat to Maryland's agricultural community, especially vineyards, and is a growing nuisance statewide. Reducing the prevalence of the tree of heaven is widely recognized as a key strategy in controlling the spread of the spotted lanternfly.

HB35 is carefully constructed to allow counties and municipalities to craft ordinances that reflect their unique land-use patterns, ecological conditions and enforcement capacities.

Importantly, the bill also recognizes that removal must be done with responsibility. Improper cutting can cause the tree of heaven to resprout aggressively, worsening the problem. That is why HB35 authorizes bounty and native tree replacement programs that rely on proper species identification and professionally accepted eradication methods, as outlined by the University of Maryland Extension. These programs encourage residents not only to remove invasive trees , but also reintroduce native species that help prevent reinfestation and restore biodiversity.

By allowing the removal and necessary ordinances for the management of invasive trees, this bill, as amended, will benefit the economy and ecosystem of Maryland. This legislation builds on Maryland's existing invasive species framework by aligning local authority with Maryland Department of Agriculture's Prohibited Invasive Plant List. By doing so, it ensures that regulatory action is responsive to evolving environmental threats.

HB35 represents a proactive step toward protecting Maryland's environment, safeguarding infrastructure and supporting our agriculture economy. By empowering local governments with the tools they need to manage invasive trees responsibly, we can reduce long-term costs and preserve native ecosystems for future generations.

I urge a favorable vote for HB35. Thank you. I'm happy to answer any questions.