

HB342_Behler_FAV.pdf

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Environment and Transportation
Committee

Subcommittees

Agriculture and Aquaculture

Energy

Environment

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 11, 2026

Testimony in Favor of House Bill 342
Forestry Licenses - Applicant Qualifications - Alterations

Chair Korman, Vice-Chair Guyton, and fellow members of the Environment and Transportation Committee:

I respectfully request a favorable report of House Bill 342 to update the educational requirements to qualify for a Forestry License here in Maryland. This legislation is necessitated by an accreditation change made by the Society of American Foresters.

In 2024, the Society of American Foresters (SAF) published a revised accreditation handbook which provided a new accreditation for colleges and universities with urban forestry programs – urban forestry programs differ significantly from traditional forestry programs, and would not necessarily contain the required course work to enable a person to proficiently practice forestry in Maryland.

Current law, however, does not take this into account, and an individual could apply for and obtain a license to practice forestry in Maryland with a degree from an SAF accredited urban forestry program.

This legislation would give the Board of Foresters the authority to review an applicant's transcript to determine if the accreditation is under the forestry standard or the urban forestry standard and make a decision to approve or deny the application based on the college degree and potential course work in traditional forestry obtained by the applicant.

Additionally, this legislation would enable applicants with equivalent internationally accredited degrees (that are not accredited by the Society of American Foresters) to be eligible to apply for a forester license in Maryland. We are potentially working out additional clarifying amendments with the Department of Natural Resources.

Once again, I respectfully request a favorable report of House Bill 342.

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Wes Moore, Governor
Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor
Josh Kurtz, Secretary
David Goshorn, Deputy Secretary

February 11, 2026

BILL NUMBER: HOUSE BILL 342 – FIRST READER

SHORT TITLE: FORESTRY LICENSES – APPLICANT QUALIFICATIONS – ALTERATIONS

DEPARTMENT’S POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS

EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT’S POSITION

The Department supports the bill’s goal of ensuring that licensed foresters possess appropriate education and training consistent with professional standards. However, the Department recommends amendments to preserve flexibility for the State Board of Foresters to evaluate qualifications on a case-by-case basis and to avoid unintentionally excluding qualified individuals based solely on accreditation status or degree title.

The Department’s recommended amendments maintain Board oversight and professional standards while allowing flexibility to recognize substantially equivalent education, including graduate, interdisciplinary, and international degrees, so that qualified applicants are not excluded due to evolving degree titles or accreditation structures.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Maryland law requires individuals seeking a forestry license to meet specific education and experience qualifications established in the Business Occupations and Professions Article. Under current statute, applicants must graduate from a four-year forestry curriculum approved by the State Board of Foresters and demonstrate at least two years of professional forestry experience indicating competence to practice.

The Society of American Foresters (SAF) is the nationally recognized professional organization that accredits forestry degree programs in the United States and establishes standards for forestry education. In recent years, colleges and universities have expanded the number and variety of natural resource–related degree programs, including interdisciplinary, graduate-level, and international programs. While many of these programs provide rigorous and relevant forestry training, they may not always carry SAF accreditation or fit neatly within traditional degree titles, potentially excluding otherwise qualified applicants from licensure consideration.

House Bill 342 updates statutory education requirements for forestry licensure to reflect accreditation standards and modern educational pathways while maintaining the Board’s role in evaluating applicant qualifications.

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BILL EXPLANATION

As written, House Bill 342 alters the qualifications for applicants seeking a forestry license by modifying the educational requirements in §7–304 of the Business Occupations and Professions Article. Specifically, the bill:

- Requires that an applicant graduate from a four-year forestry curriculum at a college or university that is both approved by the Board **and** accredited by the Society of American Foresters **or** an equivalent accrediting entity.
- Retains the existing requirement that applicants have at least two years of forestry experience demonstrating competency to practice forestry.
- Makes no changes to the Board’s authority to determine whether an applicant meets licensure standards or to the licensure process overall.
- Takes effect on October 1, 2026.

The bill is intended to strengthen educational standards for licensed foresters while ensuring consistency with nationally recognized accreditation practices.

BY:

(To be offered in the Environment and Transportation Committee)

AMENDMENT TO HOUSE BILL 342

(First Reading File Bill)

AMENDMENT NO. 1

On page 1, strike from “requiring” in line 3 down through “accreditation” in line 5 and substitute “authorizing the State Board of Foresters to accept certain substantially equivalent education requirements for forestry licensure”.

AMENDMENT NO. 2

On page 1, in line 20, strike the colon; in line 21, strike “**(I)**”; and in the same line, strike “**; OR**”.

On page 2, strike line 1 in its entirety; strike beginning with “The” in line 2 down through “forestry” in line 3 and substitute “**NOTWITHSTANDING SUBSECTION (B) OF THIS SECTION, AN APPLICANT MAY MEET THE REQUIREMENTS OF THIS SECTION IF THE BOARD DETERMINES THAT THE APPLICANT’S EDUCATION, INCLUDING A COMPARABLE GRADUATE DEGREE OR INTERNATIONAL DEGREE, IS SUBSTANTIALLY EQUIVALENT TO THE EDUCATION REQUIRED UNDER SUBSECTION (B) OF THIS SECTION**”.