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Committee: Environment and Transportation
Testimony on: HB1114 – "Illegal Dumping and Litter Control Law – Yard Waste – Disposal on Highways"
Hearing Date: February 25, 2021
Position: Favorable

The Maryland Sierra Club requests a favorable report on HB1114. This bill adds yard waste (such as leaves, grass cuttings, and yard prunings) to existing litter laws so as to prohibit disposal of yard waste on highways. The bill also establishes penalties for violations, and requires that violators either remedy the unlawful disposal or reimburse the governmental entity for its costs in removing the unlawfully disposed material.

Unsightly dumping of green waste such as leaf litter and yard waste is problematic for many reasons. Improper disposal along highways and public lands is a wildfire risk, is dangerous to small vehicles and boats, and can block drains resulting in flooding.[1] Leaf litter also is a leading cause of phosphorus in stormwater.[2]

Piles of yard waste can become epicenters for invasive species[3] that can act as agricultural pests. These plant invaders can spread and destroy the biodiversity that protects against stormwater loss and promotes resilience to climate change (see Figure 1). The seeds and other growing parts inside the yard waste can fan out and destroy trees and harm farm management.

Leaf "litter" is actually an important ecosystem. For example, when leaves are left where they fall, many immature and adult butterflies live there during the winter. Additionally, leaves left in yards provide a habitat for caterpillars who in turn are an important source of food for birds. Research indicates one of the reasons for the decreased number of birds is the lack of caterpillars.[4] Public education about the benefits of keeping leaf litter onsite, and information on available resources in jurisdictions to properly dispose of yard waste and invasive plants, provide alternatives to highway dumping.

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[1] Five Dangerous Effects of Green Waste Dumping (May 8, 2017) https://ecoparts.com/5-dangerous-effects-green-waste-dumping/#:~:text=Altered%20Biodiversity%20When%20green%20waste,they%20lose%20access%20to%20sunlight.&text=Depending%20on%20the%20plants%20present,the%20biodiversity%20of%20the%20area .

[2] Selbig, W. R. (November 2016). Evaluation of leaf removal as a means to reduce nutrient concentrations and loads in urban stormwater. *Science of the Total Environment, 571*, 124-133. https://www.usgs.gov/news/removal-fallen-leaves-can-improve-urban-water-quality#:~:text=The%20USGS%2Dled%20study%20found,prior%20to%20a%20rain%20event .

[3] Plaza, P. I., Speziale, K. L, & Lambertucci, S. A. (2018). Rubbish dumps as invasive plant epicentres. *Biological Invasions, 20, 2277-2283.* https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10530-018-1708-1#:~:text=Rubbish%20dumps%20can%20act%20as,distant%20sites%20through%20different%20pathways.&text=Dumps%20may%20favour%20the%20spread,but%20also%20to%20distant%20sites.

[4] Rosenberg, K. V., et al. (04 October, 2019). Decline of North American avifauna. *Science, 366*(6461), 120-124. DOI: 10.1126/science.aaw1313 https://science.sciencemag.org/content/366/6461/120

Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America's oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 75,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters

For these reasons, we urge you to support HB1114.

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Figure 1. Plants growing out of yard waste dumped in Maryland park.
Photo Credit: Janet Gingold

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