

Testimony of Elly Cowan
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Before the
Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
January 25, 2022

Pertaining To: SB7, Invasive and Native Plants- Classification, Listing, Use, and
Sales and Use Tax

Support

On behalf of the staff and Board of Directors of Preservation Maryland, I thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the value of history, preservation, and sustainability in Maryland.

Through our Smart Growth Maryland program, Preservation Maryland advocates for a more environmentally and economically sustainable future that creates opportunities for all Marylanders through better development patterns.

SUPPORT FOR SENATE BILL 7

Preservation Maryland supports SB7, which would expand the list of invasive plants that are regulated by the state and adds a list of native plants that can be used as alternatives to invasives. The bill also requires state projects to prioritize the use of native plants and incentivizes their use by exempting the state's purchase of native plants from the sales and use tax. We believe that SB7 help reduce the spread and negative ecological consequences of invasive plants, while at the same time promoting the use of native species.

The use of native plants has the environmental benefits of requiring much less watering, fertilizer, and pesticides, and they can prevent water run-off and improve air quality. By eliminating the need for excessive mowing and maintenance, native plants can play a role in reducing pollution. On the other hand, invasive plants can cause millions of dollars in economic and environmental damage and can exacerbate the effects of other environmental threats like climate change. Therefore, we strongly believe that the use of native plants should be encouraged.

However, we understand that making the right choice in what to plant can be difficult without knowing to what is and isn't a native plant. SB7 addresses this issue by requiring the Department of Agriculture to classify Tier 1 and Tier 2 invasive plants in accordance with the National Park Service's and US Fish and Wildlife Service's Plant Invaders of Mid-Atlantic Natural Areas, while also allowing the Department to classify additional plants as well. At the same time, the Department of Natural Resources would be required to create, maintain, and publish on their website a list of plants native to Maryland, identifying which natives can be used as alternatives for invasive counterparts.

Importantly, SB7 also requires state funded projects to prioritize the use of native plants. Armed with the knowledge provided by the lists required above, state projects seeking to plant native plants would be incentivized to do so by exempting sales of native plants to the state from the sales and use tax, ostensibly making those projects more financially viable.

SB7 would go a long way in encouraging the use of native plants, with all the benefits that follow, in landscaping across the state by making it easier to identify the right native plants to use and incentivizing their purchase for state projects. Therefore, I respectfully urge a favorable report of SB7.

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