



Testimony: **HB0015 Invasive and Native Plants – Classification, Listing, Use, and Sales and Use Tax**

Position: **Favorable**

Committee: **Budget and Taxation Committee and Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee**

Hearing Date: **January 26, 2022**

The Green Towson Alliance unites Towson area environmentalists in Baltimore County to achieve a greener, healthier, more beautiful community through collaboration and activism. We support SB0007 to expand the list of invasive plants that are regulated in Maryland. Plants introduced from other continents generally cannot be ingested by insects in our area and as a result are not part of the vital food web that supports our ecosystem. Worse, they can escape into natural areas. These plants become invasive when they out-compete the native plants that support our local food web. Invasive plants are difficult to eradicate, threaten agricultural systems and can have negative public health consequences.

Banning the use and sale of invasive plants is a logical first step in their control. Government agencies and non-governmental organizations are on the frontline attempting to eradicate invasive plants when they inevitably escape our gardens. A 2013 study reports the cost of invasive species to the United States is \$120 billion per year. Our organization works on public and private land to restore healthy habitats by removing invasive plants. This work is tedious and endless. Because of the aggressive nature of invasive plants, it can take months to years to accomplish significant gains. It is demoralizing that the same plants our weed warriors work so diligently to control can be purchased and planted in a garden nearby where animals, wind, and water will spread them right back into the very same natural area.

Maryland's list of invasive plants should include all those that have agricultural and public health consequences. On January 20, 2022 the Department of Agriculture expanded quarantines throughout Maryland to control the spread of the Asian Spotted Lanternfly (*Lycorma delicatula*) due to the insect's negative impact on agricultural operations. Lanternflies feed on 70 different types of crops, but invasive Tree of Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*), the Lanternfly's favored host plant, is not currently listed as an invasive plant in Maryland.

The invasive plants Barberry and Honeysuckle play a role in Lyme disease. White-footed mice make their nests under the protection of the prickly branches of Barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*) and in the dense roots of Honeysuckle (*Lonicera*) plants. Tick larvae live on the white-footed mouse and there they pick up the bacteria that cause Lyme disease. Controlling the sale of Barberry and Honeysuckle means less cover for the mice and more predation by hawks, fox and owls. Fewer mice equal less Lyme disease in humans. Currently, only one kind of Honeysuckle is banned from sale in Maryland.

Eliminating sales tax from the cost of purchasing plants that are native to Maryland is an excellent incentive for consumers to purchase those plants as alternatives to plants on the invasive list. The savings will also aid those working to restore habitat to natural areas by replacing invasive plants with native plants.

Please support this legislation to stem the damage being done to our natural areas by invasive plants. The Secretary of Agriculture needs to classify each plant identified as invasive in the NPS and US Fish and Wildlife Service Plant Invaders of Mid-Atlantic Natural Areas in a timely manner. We request resources be allocated to complete the lengthy science-based assessments of invasive plants on the list within a three year period.

Thank you for your attention to my testimony,

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