

ERIC LUEDTKE
Legislative District 14
Montgomery County

MAJORITY LEADER

Ways and Means Committee
Chair, Revenues Subcommittee



The Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen Street, Room 350
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
301-858-3110 • 410-841-3110
800-492-7122 Ext. 3110
Fax 301-858-3053 • 410-841-3053
Eric.Luedtke@house.state.md.us

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

SPONSOR TESTIMONY

House Bill 15 - Invasive and Native Plants – Classification, Listing, Use, and Sales and Use Tax

Madame Chair, Member of the Ways and Means Committee

In 1962, a Maryland resident named Rachel Carson published a book called *Silent Spring*. That book detailed, in powerful language, the impact of pesticides like DDT on the environment. And it is credited, in part, with sparking the environmental movements. This book was titled *Silent Spring* in reference to the lack of birdsong and insect sounds in a world where overuse of DDT and similar chemicals had wiped out animal life. Overuse of pesticides, though, is not the only thing that can silence spring.

The natural world is an extraordinary thing. Nature, over the millenia, created an almost unimaginable variety of plants, animals, and other living things that interact in an astoundingly complex, interdependent tapestry. That interdependence, though, means that if we as humans pull one thread on the tapestry, disrupt one part of the web of life, it will inevitably impact others.

This is the case with the replacement of native species by invasive species, both plant and animal. Over the centuries, human beings have introduced a huge number of invasive species to Maryland. As these species have displaced native species, they have increasingly disrupted the natural world. And, like it or not, this has impacted the human world in turn, because we are a part of the tapestry as well.

My home is surrounded by the woods just up the hill from the Patuxent River. My entire front yard is forested. But I rarely see any animal life there. Few birds. Few insects. Few mammals. When I first moved here I was puzzled as to why. But as the growing season continued in that first year, I understood. You see, the entire understory of my front yard consisted of non-native and invasive species. Japanese Stiltgrass. Garlic Mustard. Japanese Barberry. Plants that native species of animals cannot live on. Plants that had created what was for all intents and purposes an ecological desert.

And what's shocking is that we, as a society, keep putting these invasive species in the ground. This is part of the reason native pollinator populations aren't as robust as they once were, threatening agriculture. It's part of the reason wildlife populations aren't as strong as they might otherwise be. And while this is grim, it is solvable. The state has gone about solving this by actively killing and removing these invasive species from certain areas when they grow out of control. House Bill 15 proposes a way to slow the spread of these harmful species at their source.

The bill requires the Department of Agriculture, who currently regulates invasive plant species in Maryland, to adopt the comprehensive US Fish and Wildlife Services list of invasive plant species in our region. This step will prevent the sale of some of the most dangerous invasive plant species and provide consumers with the information necessary to make responsible purchasing decisions. In addition, the bill will require the state to use native plants instead of non-native alternatives whenever possible. In order to make this as simple for agencies as possible, the bill also requires the Department of Natural Resources to develop and publish on their website a list of native plant species for Maryland, including identification of native plants that are feasible alternatives for any Tier 2 invasive plants. Lastly, House Bill 15 will eliminate the sales tax on native plants to further incentivize their purchase.

House Bill 15 is a simple approach to solving an issue that poses a major threat to ecosystems and agricultural land across the state. I thank you for your consideration of this proposal and ask the Committee to issue a favorable report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Eric Luedtke", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Delegate Eric Luedtke