



Maryland Native Plant Society

APPRECIATION CONSERVATION EDUCATION

Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Testimony for SB0836: “Maryland Native Plants Program”

Sponsor: Senator Brooks

Position: Support

Hearing Date: March 2, 2023

The Maryland Native Plant Society (MNPS) strongly supports Senate Bill 836 because of its importance to the continued existence of native plants, native animals, healthy environments, and human beings.

MNPS is a 501(c)(3) non-profit with over two thousand very active members, making a difference in Maryland for 30 years. We hold annual meetings throughout the State, from Talbot and Cecil Counties to Alleghany and Prince George’s Counties. Our mission is to promote awareness, appreciation, and conservation of Maryland’s native plants and their habitats. We pursue our mission through education, research, advocacy, and service activities. I am Vice President of MNPS, a Board Director for the Mid-Atlantic Invasive Plant Council, and the founder of EcoPlant Consulting, which specializes in native plants, invasive plants, and ecology. I co-authored *Plant-Invaders of Mid-Atlantic Natural Areas, Field Guide*, printed in October 2022 with over 20,000 pre-orders.

SB0836 is an excellent bill that combines voluntary participation with public education and business promotion. Native plant growers and retailers can experience revenue growth, while homeowners and landscapers can access more of the native plants that they want. The University of Maryland Extension has reported that interest in native plants has been increasing significantly across the board. For example, the most visited webpage in 2022 was *Recommended Native Plants for Maryland*, with unique page views increasing over 90% from 2021 to 2022.

Native plants are at the base of the food web, and people are at the top. If we don’t encourage growing native plants, most of our pollinators and other beneficial insects will die off, and only wind-pollinated crops will persist. Over 95% of U.S. land birds feed their nestlings on native caterpillars and other insects. When birds migrate or overwinter, they depend on the nutrition and fats in native berries. Recent scientific studies show birds who eat berries from alien plants are less healthy. Without native insects and fruits, the skies will become silent. Without native plants and the rest of the complex interrelated food web, humans might not be able to survive.

Loss of biodiversity is as much a threat to our existence as climate change. According to a 2023 report by NatureServe's scientists, one third of the U.S.'s plant species may go extinct. Healthy habitats require a lot of diversity to sustain themselves, but over 40% of U.S. ecosystems are at risk of collapse.

Due to extensive development and farming, wild areas have been disappearing. Native plants are becoming more dependent on cultivated landscapes to survive. With this proposed legislation, the Commercial Maryland Native Plant List will provide a much needed resource. We will know what species can best help Maryland's environment, and they will become more widely available.

If we plant genetically diverse Maryland natives, they can cross pollinate with their wild siblings. Consequently, species will be healthier and more resilient in the face of climate change. The plants will be better able to adapt to temperature extremes, flooding and drought. In contrast, plant populations that are too small or not genetically diverse can result in die-offs, similar to what occurred during the Irish potato famine. Just like when small human populations interbreed, diseases could cause major plant problems.

It's time for us to use more native plants—to take small actions that combine to make a big difference. We need to grow native plants so that the food web can survive. The Maryland Native Plant Society respectively urges a favorable report on SB0836.

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References:

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