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SB0836
“Maryland Native Plant Program”
Hearing Date: March 2, 2023
Education, Energy, and the
Environment Committee
Favorable

Good afternoon. My name is Meredith McDonagh, from Towson, and speaking for several garden clubs.

I am in favor of the Legislation SB0836.

Every spring I impatiently wait for the Indian Pink (*Spigelia marilandica*) to bloom- red/yellow flowers calling hummingbirds to drink, in summer there is red cardinal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*) followed by lavender Obedient plant (*Physostegia virginiana*). Then in early fall a large flock of chattering robins comes to feast on the red berries of my American holly (*Ilex opaca*). What links these experiences together is, literally, the buzz, movement and vibration surrounding and amongst the native plants; I feel very happy to feed hungry creatures as I am in their “world”. The garden is “alive” with life and activity.

If I do not see insects on a plant, then there is a good chance it is not native and not even a good food or habitat source.

Over the years I see fewer native plants on my wooded land with stream; my garden has become “quiet.” It may look pretty, but it lacks vibrancy and is quite flat; it is essentially a dead zone. What is left withstands drought and deluge and requires minimal care. I am currently adding more natives to fenced my yard, helping wildlife and the planet. We need to do this for future generations.

Our smaller nurseries are a true gift, equipped with trained and knowledgeable staff. They offer straight species and cultivars of, with some system of signage and information, which is terrific and which I do not see at big box stores. Alas, these nurseries are located usually in a suburban area- not urban where also needed.

For me, it would be more helpful to have the plant information available and consolidated in ‘one place,’ making it easier to refer to in real time at a shop when time is short. And I would like to see more variety and number of straight species available to grow on my property. Straight species offer maximum genetic diversity and “flexibility” (1) and so can adapt to our changing climate conditions. Straight species hosts specific fauna and since most are open pollinated*, there is a longer bloom time across time, as individual flowers bloom independently across time. (2). This means a longer lunch hour for wildlife! Last, they are imperative as a source for future development of native cultivars.

I support a Native Plant Specialist position for many reasons including for/to:

*Change public perception and behavior and from the Horticultural (pretty plants!) to inclusions and emphasis on the Ecological (need for natives for crop pollination and genetic source). Make choosing natives an easy option and respond to public’s desire to help protect/foster pollinators/food chain. Perception of leadership and authority.

*Information – centralization, consolidation, current, researched to make best decisions and to make it easy for the public to know which is a straight native species, where to find them and with cultural requirements cited. Publicize all local events and sales of native plants.

* Influence: advocate for and authority for use of native species on public property, the ability to update old landscape manuals (i.e., Baltimore County).

*Focus on latest research for such as:

- Current information on cultivars, including nutritional value of, which could be a doorway into increased choice of straight species natives and over non-natives by the public because the public is usually more familiar with cultivars than species.

- Expanding definition of the range of natives to MD based on climate change and changing bird migration. .

*Stakeholder support for best outcome of intended legislation:

Currently, nurseries bear much of the responsibility of educating the public when purchase is at hand and when the customer may have not researched information beforehand. Shocking but true: “I want to buy a native Japanese Maple.” Japanese means from Japan, nowhere in USA! “I want to plant native; how about a Euonymus?” This is a popular, heavily used plant which the public may assume is native because it is prevalent, familiar in the landscape.

Certification possibility for the future: assuage unease about what this currently means for nurseries that feel they are doing a good job now of offering native plants.

In closing: no native plants mean, ultimately, no wildlife. The lack of natives affect so much- our food chain/pollination/stormwater management/climate change tolerance/clean water, etc. Environmental issues permeate every other challenge or issue we face as human beings. Thank you for supporting future positive possibilities!

(1, 2): [Genetic-Diversity-and-Plant-Presentation-PDF.pdf](#)

*open pollinated: referring to sexual reproduction, these are plants pollinated by animals (birds, insects, etc.), wind or humans or they self-pollinate, resulting in seed that is true to the parent plants' genetic make-up.

Sources:

<https://lawnlove.com/blog/native-cultivar-vs-straight-species-native-plants/>

[Genetic-Diversity-and-Plant-Presentation-PDF.pdf](#)