



Testimony in SUPPORT of SB836 – Maryland Native Plants Program

March 1, 2023

Dear Chairman Feldman and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in **SUPPORT** of **SB836** on behalf of ShoreRivers and the organizations listed below. ShoreRivers is a river protection group on Maryland's Eastern Shore with more than 2,000 members. Our mission is to protect and restore our Eastern Shore waterways through science-based advocacy, restoration, and education.

This bill will create the Maryland Native Plants Program, which will promote the use and sale of plants that are native to Maryland, and provide education and outreach to the public about the benefits to using native plants. The University of Maryland Extension Office will hire native plant specialists to help with this education component and provide a valuable resource for residents looking to make positive changes on their personal and community properties. This program will also be supported by the Department of Natural Resources and the Department of Agriculture, both of which already have the infrastructure in place to promote Maryland-centric goods and services. Since these systems are already in place it would require only a minor lift to include native plants in these promotions.

Species extinction and habitat loss are two major issues facing native plants and animals, as well as many of the food systems and ecosystems that humans depend on. With thousands of species at risk of extinction within the next few decades due to habitat loss and fragmentation, Marylanders need to protect and restore as much land as possible for pollinator species through the use of native plants. **By making these plants more accessible and their benefits better understood, Marylanders will be able to make real, tangible improvements to their local ecosystems that will benefit local species and local water quality.** Many local nurseries are interested in stocking more native plant material and have already begun replacing many non-native or invasive options with native alternatives. This bill will make this process much easier, as well as provide promotion for the nursery. Using signage, stickers, and other easy to understand visual devices will make it easier for residents with no plant knowledge to make the right choices. More and more research is showing that stitching together small habitats into conservation corridors may make the essential difference needed for all species, including our own, to thrive. In a time when it is easy to feel despondent about our environmental future, native plants provide a viable path forward.

We support this bill because it will make native plants more accessible to Marylanders and prioritize their use at the local scale, while improving habitat value and local water quality. We urge the Committee to adopt a **FAVORABLE** report on **SB836**.

Sincerely,

Zack Kelleher
Sassafras Riverkeeper, on behalf of ShoreRivers

Other organizations in support: Assateague Coastkeeper and Waterkeepers Chesapeake.

ShoreRivers

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