

**BENJAMIN BROOKS**  
*Legislative District 10*  
Baltimore County

Education, Energy, and the  
Environment Committee



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**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENT OF SB836**  
**Maryland Native Plants Program**

Education, Energy and the Environment Committee  
March 2, 2023

Chair Feldman, Vice-Chair Kagan and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you on SB836– Maryland Native Plants Program. The purpose of this bill is to encourage and promote the use and sale of plants native to Maryland at certain businesses and to educate the public on native plants. Furthermore, it would require the University of Maryland Extension to develop several programs to promote native plants and educate the public on them.

Native plants are crucial to Maryland’s ecosystem and food-chain. Not only do they contribute to our environment’s biodiversity, but they are also the only food source for many important pollinators including bees, butterflies, and other insects. Studies suggest that restoring native habitat near farms can also increase crop yield. Further, since native plants have deeper root systems, they act as filters to keep our waterways cleaner.

SB836 will support native plants in three ways:

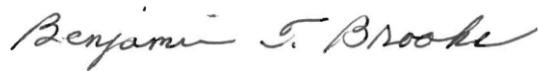
1. It would require the University of Maryland Extension to hire a Native Plant Specialist to administer the Native Plants Program which would encourage the use and sale of native plants by garden centers and nurseries. The coordinator would also teach the public and landscapers about the benefits of growing native plants and growing techniques
2. The University of Maryland Extension, in coordination with the Department of Natural Resources and the Maryland Native Plant Society, will also be required to develop a native plant list and a marketing program called “Maryland Natives” to promote the use and sale of native plants. This will be done through a sticker program where retailers may place “Maryland Native” stickers on approved plants.
3. These same agencies will also create a voluntary certification program for growers and retailers to be identified as a Maryland Native Plant Grower or Retailer.

Many plant buyers in Maryland want to support the local environment. Having an outreach program activate their sensibilities is key to shifting consumer sentiment towards native plants. Furthermore, a native-plant specialist will provide much-needed guidance for taking care of these plants.

Similar programs have been initiated in other states. In 2022, New Jersey unanimously passed the Jersey Native Plants Program which established a labeling program for plants sold at nurseries. Furthermore, the New Jersey Department of Transportation is required by law to use only native vegetation for landscaping and habitat restoration projects.

By, supporting our native plants, we can support our entire State's ecosystem but that begins on the grassroots level by educating consumers and landscapers. For these reasons, I am requesting a favorable report on SB836.

With kindest regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Benjamin T. Brooks". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the closing phrase "With kindest regards,".

Benjamin Brooks