

Cutting Edge Tree Experts

February 22, 2023

HB-612 Natural Resources – Licensed Tree Experts – Alterations

Sponsor: Delegate Courtney Watson

Position: Favorable

Good afternoon, Chairman Barve, Vice Chairman Stein, and members of the committee. Thank you for allowing me to present House Bill 612.

For the last almost 20 years, I have owned and operated Cutting Edge Tree Experts. I had initially started the company with my father and mother. I worked hard to develop the company while working as a law enforcement officer for a local jurisdiction. This encompassed numerous hours of training and continued education in tree care. My focus was always to build a company that offered quality tree care and service to the customers we served.

Over the last few years, I have seen a dramatic increase in unlicensed tree companies as well as companies working under someone else's tree license with no supervision. We have been requested for a second opinion on multiple occasions where an owner had been given a recommendation by an unlicensed tree company to cut down a tree as it was dead. After thoroughly inspecting the tree, it was discovered that the tree was not dead but rather needed minor pruning / care. This saved the customer several thousands of dollars while also saving several mature trees which benefits the environment. These unlicensed tree trimmers are damaging trees because of a lack of education, experience, and licensing. In addition, we have witnessed climbers for unlicensed companies, spiking trees they are trimming and conducting improper trimming techniques, which can cause harm or death to the tree.

I have taken great pride in my company and the exceptional tree service and care we offer. But it offends me to see community members that are taken advantage of by unlicensed companies. Even while employed as a law enforcement officer, I was asked to consult on a case in which an elderly couple were bilked out of thousands of dollars after answering a knock on their door from an unlicensed company that told them there were dead trees in their backyard and they could fall on their house. I was asked by the officer handling the case to evaluate the trees. I determined the trees were healthy and should not have been cut down. To avoid any conflict of interest, I also provided resources through the University Of Maryland who also became involved and confirmed the trees were healthy and should not have been taken down.

After numerous calls to Department of Natural Resources (DNR) on unlicensed tree companys, I was advised that the fine was not considerable enough to sway any unlicensed tree company from operating in Maryland. In almost every case of unlicensed operations, the homeowner is provided with business cards or have observed equipment that is marked as having a license and

being insured. Many customers are not aware of DNR's website that provides a list of licensed tree companies. And those customers who are aware of the website, actually have a false sense of security as the insurance policies these companies have may actually not be for tree work.

Tree work has been ranked one of the most dangerous occupations in America. Companies working under other insurance policies, outside of tree work policies, jeopardize the employees and the customers. These policies are typically purchased because they are cheaper for the company.

There are many reputable tree companies that operate within the State of Maryland but those companies need the support of state legislators to ensure they continue to operate with due diligence to tree care and ensuring individuals aren't being taken advantage of by those that abuse the system. In summary, to protect the homeowners and businesses within the State of Maryland who utilize tree service companies, we respectfully request the following:

- increase in fines for violators to deter those violators from committing more offenses,
- limiting one license to one company
- Requiring a licensed tree expert to carry, show proof of, and maintain valid worker's compensation insurance