

COURTNEY WATSON  
Legislative District 9B  
Howard County

DEPUTY MAJORITY WHIP

Appropriations Committee

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Vice Chair, Transportation  
and the Environment



Annapolis Office  
The Maryland House of Delegates  
6 Bladen Street, Room 214  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
410-841-3077 · 301-858-3077  
800-492-7122 Ext. 3077  
Courtney.Watson@house.state.md.us

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 22, 2023

HB-612 Natural Resources - Licensed Tree Experts - Alterations

**SPONSOR:** Delegate Courtney Watson

**POSITION:** Favorable

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HB-612 is a consumer protection bill regarding licensed Tree Experts - and other companies who represent to the public that they are Tree Experts, but they are not licensed and do not meet the stringent standards of licensing in Maryland. This bill prohibits a person from engaging in the treatment, care, or removal of trees over 20-feet tall for compensation under a Tree Expert's license unless the person is employed by the licensed Tree Expert.

Tree trimming and tree care of trees over 20 feet tall is one of the most dangerous occupations in the country. Improper tree care of large trees is damaging to the environment. This bill prohibits an unlicensed company from operating under the license of a Tree Expert in Maryland.

To date, there are approximately 1300 licensed Tree Experts in the state. However, Maryland law allows any company to act under the license of a licensed Tree Expert. There is a concern among members of the industry that there is a lack of oversight, lack of training resulting in damage to large trees, and lack of safety procedures putting workers and land owners at risk. Unlicensed companies caring for trees often employ poor practices, such as tree spiking, to the detriment of the consumer and to the environment. Tree spiking leads to infectious infestations like bacterial blight or fire blight spreading between tree species.

The issue with "any" unlicensed company using a licensed Tree Expert's license number is one problem causing environmental damage. The other problem is unlicensed contractors who are performing work on trees. For that reason, at the suggestion of the Department of Natural Resources, this bill increases the second fine for performing unlawful unlicensed tree work.

This bill would keep the initial fine for practicing without a license at the initial standard rate of \$250 and raise the subsequent charge from \$1,000 to \$2,000 to deter repeat offenders.

In summary, tree trimming is one of the most dangerous occupations in America. It follows that with such an occupation the state should verify that licensees have workers' compensation insurance in place along with the already required property and casualty insurance specifically for Tree Experts. This bill would make that requirement.

Stakeholders in the industry believe these alterations to current standards are effective solutions to deter individuals from operating a tree care business without proper licensing, while protecting consumers, trees, the environment, and importantly - employees in this line of work.

Thank you for your consideration of this bill. I am happy to answer any questions.

*Courtney Watson*

Delegate Courtney Watson  
Howard County District 9B