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**Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment**  
**Testimony on: SB836 – Maryland Native Plants Program**  
**Position: Support**  
**Hearing Date: March 2, 2023**

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club supports SB836, Maryland Native Plants Program. The bill will help to educate growers, retailers, and consumers about vitally important Maryland grown native plants and it will help Maryland businesses gain market share in this fast growing plant category. It will also support consumers with clear and helpful information they are seeking from planning though purchase.

Native plants are the keystone food for much of our wildlife, including existentially important native pollinators. Of the 100 crop species that supply 90% of human nutrition, over 70 require bee pollination.<sup>1</sup> Many of our important crops rely on **native** bees, including squash, pumpkins, tomatoes, blueberries, cranberries, and sunflowers, to name a few. According to the United States Geological Survey (USGS), in almost all crops, native bees are the primary pollinator or they significantly supplement the activity of European honeybees. Even crops like cotton, soybeans, and peppers that do not need a pollinator have a higher yield if visited by bees.<sup>2</sup> Native pollinators are critical to sustain food production for people and for wildlife that supports the food web. When we plant native plants, we are helping sustain our native pollinators.

In addition, 75% of all North American plant species require an insect, frequently bees, to pollinate them and allow that plant to reproduce.<sup>3</sup> Without critical pollinators, these plants die out. Imagine our world without three quarters of our plants.

Most of our native pollinators and other wildlife have coevolved to need native plants. Between 20%-45% of native bees require specific native plants.<sup>4</sup> Many people are now aware that without milkweed, Monarch butterflies will not reproduce. These once abundant, iconic butterflies are now endangered with extinction. This same story exists for countless species throughout the plant and animal kingdom, many of which are keystone species in the food web on which we depend.

While the decline of wildlife species is complex, in many cases it comes down to not having the food they need in the form of a native tree or other native plant. Over centuries, we have removed native trees and other plants and put non-native and sometimes even invasive plants in their place. While these plants may have appealing attributes, too frequently they do not support our Maryland wildlife, including our vitally important pollinators.

In addition, to helping sustain our biodiversity, native plants also help our watershed. Native plants, frequently deep rooted, help with storm water management, sediment control, and Bay health. For too long they have been under appreciated by too many. However, many Americans are now gaining an understanding about the connection between native plants and our wildlife. Over 67 million Americans reported buying a plant to benefit our bees, butterflies, or birds.<sup>5</sup>

Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America's oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.

Marylanders, like other Americans, want to help, but consumers need better information both when they are planning their garden and at point of purchase about what is native to where they live and what will grow best in their setting.

This voluntary program will provide important information to consumers to help them choose the right native plant that will grow best here and support our wildlife. It will also help develop the small, but growing, Maryland native-plant grower and retail business sector. This program is good for the environment, helps to build Maryland-grown products to address a growing consumer market opportunity, and helps support consumer interest in these essential plants.

For the reasons provided, we respectfully request a favorable report on SB 836.

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<sup>1</sup> Humans Must Change Behaviour to Save Bees, Vital for Food Production, March 10, 2011, *United Nations UN News*, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2011/03/368622>

<sup>2</sup> USGS, <https://www.usgs.gov/faqs/what-role-native-bees-united-states>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Ordóñez-Lancet, Jessica, “50% increase in People Planting for Wildlife” *The National Wildlife Federation*, May 6, 2021 (<https://www.nwf.org/Latest-News/Press-Releases/2021/05-06-21-Garden-for-Wildlife-Month-2021>)