

SB 317 SUPPORT

Natural Resources - Food Forests and Foraging Program - Establishment

Environment and Transportation Committee

February 11th, 2025

Good afternoon Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Education, Energy, and Environment and Committee:

My name is Tierney Acosta and I am testifying favorably in regards to Senate Bill 317. I am the President and Founder of the Permaculture Club at Montgomery County Community College and I am majoring in Horticulture and Sustainable Agri-Business. As of May 2024, 40% of the student body at Montgomery College is experiencing food insecurity ¹. The Permaculture Club has partnered with the Community Food Forest Collective (CFFC) to tackle this issue head on, specifically on the Takoma Park - Silver Spring campus, and have transformed 33,000 square feet of what was once just grass into a Community Food Forest ².

This community food forest aims to bring localized and nutritious food straight to our students, faculty, staff, and surrounding communities completely free of charge. Since founding the Permaculture Club in 2023 I've met a wide variety of Maryland residents excited about our Food Forest Collective and the Food Forest on our campus, but more importantly they were eager to come back and help. For many, it was their first time being introduced to the amazing native food growing within Maryland. American persimmons, pawpaw's, black raspberries, purple, flowering, raspberries, native grapes, like muscadine, and Riverbank, and blueberries are just some of the amazing foods that are already growing within our state lands. When our visitors learned this, the message became clear: Marylanders are ready to forage.

We are ready to rekindle our relationship with the food that grows right here in our state . And although I am immensely proud of our success with our 33,000 square feet, Our food forest does not begin to cover the complete need in the state of Maryland. According to Maryland Food Bank, 1 in 3 Marylanders is currently experiencing food insecurity ³. By allowing Marylanders access to the food that grows on state lands with this new permitting system, it increases the options that Marylanders have in regards to their own food resiliency. By allowing DNR to

waive the permitting fee for our community members who are low income it ensures that this will be accessible to those who could benefit from it most.

Foraging for plants on state lands in the state of Maryland is currently not allowed, and Senate Bill 317 will not only make it legal, but ensure that it is accessible and regenerative. I urge a favorable report on SB 317 and thank you all for listening to my testimony today.

¹<https://bethesdamagazine.com/2024/05/17/takoma-park-ed-en-a-montgomery-college-student-leads-community-in-growing-food-forest/#:~:text=At%20Montgomery%20College%2C%20about%2040,Takoma%20Park%2FSilver%20Spring%20campus>.

² <https://projectfoodforest.org/what-is-a-food-forest/>

³<https://mdfoodbank.org/hunger-in-maryland/>