



BEYOND PESTICIDES

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Statement in Support with Amendments of HB 1342
by
Jay Feldman, Executive Director, Beyond Pesticides
to
Environment and Transportation Committee
House of Delegates
Maryland

March 5, 2025

Honorable Members of the Committee. I am Jay Feldman, Executive Director of Beyond Pesticides, a national, grassroots, membership organization that represents community-based organizations and a range of people seeking to improve protections from pesticides and promote alternative pest management strategies that reduce or eliminate a reliance on toxic pesticides. Our membership spans the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and groups around the world. We are submitting this statement on behalf of our supporters who are residents of Maryland.

The bill creates an important framework in creating an intent to manage state lands with practices that are protective of ecosystems, including the preservation of pollinators and human and environmental health. This is an incredibly important time to, as quickly as possible, transition land management to practices no longer dependent on petrochemical pesticides and fertilizers, given the existential health, biodiversity (including pollinators), and climate crises. Land management practices and the inputs used are critical in eliminating unnecessary reliance on petrochemicals and nurturing soil systems that draw down atmospheric carbon.

The legislation establishes a important frame for advancing a change in the definition of allowable materials in land management that are those only allowed in organic land management, as defined by the National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances in federal organic law. While this is an advancement, it is limited by language in the bill that limits the reach of the bill to insecticides and only herbicides used for aesthetic purposes. The bill language should be broader to eliminate the use of petrochemical fertilizers because it has been shown that these chemicals are not needed and their use contributes to a pesticide treadmill because they contribute to plant vulnerabilities to disease and infestation.

State legislation must, in our view, require a commitment to a systems approach on the part of land managers, recognizing the critical importance of soil organisms in the cycling of nutrients and support for resilient plants and turf. The introduction of synthetic herbicides and fertilizers into the soil is destructive of the microbial life and adversely affects a healthy soil system, resulting in a cycle of chemical dependency.

With this urgent need to transition to a sustainable systems approach for land management in the not-to-distance future, HB 1342 provides a starting point. However, we are suggesting the following changes and additions that we believe are critically needed:

1. Expand: Definition of “invasive species” in (C) to conform to Maryland state invasive species definitions.
2. Add: Definition of soil amendments. When you ask the state to come up with a “pesticide” plan, in suggesting a pest prevention plan [see 5-1103 (2)], it is important to define the allowed soil amendments, excluding petrochemical fertilizers like urea that are harmful to soil organisms and contribute to increased plant vulnerability to pest infestations and disease.
3. Delete: “Weed” definition because invasive species, including invasive weeds, are defined above in (C) and therefore not required, given that the methods used will prevent weeds and where not prevented the “listed” pesticides in (D) may be used.
4. Add: Definition of “Organic Systems and Pest Prevention Plan” that is referenced in later section of bill.
5. Delete: re. 5-1102 (A) I. “Weed Management” as an allowed material in every case. This change only allows herbicides not “listed” in the bill to be used in the case of controlling “invasive” plants. Eliminating aesthetic uses of herbicides and thereby limiting herbicide use is a helpful amendment to the bill.
6. Delete: text in (VII) “if applied around or near a foundation of a building.” This clause will allow the use of harmful pesticides, including those harmful to pollinators that are around or near a foundation foraging or pollinating plants.
7. Add: re. 5-1103 (2). Delete “pesticide” and replace with “organic systems and pest prevention plan. This provision will help to guide the state in managing land with ecological practices.

We appreciate the step forward that this legislation represents.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments.