

Committee: Health and Government Operations**Testimony on: HB368 General Provisions - Commemorative Month - Maryland Native Plant Month****Position: Support****Hearing Date: March 13, 2025**

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club supports HB368, which will establish May as the Commemorative Month for Maryland Native Plants. This will serve to increase awareness of the existential importance of native plants to wildlife, Maryland ecosystems, and humans. HB368 will provide a promotional opportunity for the Maryland nursery trade, helping them gain market share in this fast-growing plant category and, importantly, requires no state funding.

Native plants are the keystone food for much of our wildlife, including important native pollinators. Of the 100 crop species that supply 90% of human nutrition, over 70 require bee pollination.¹ Many people are unaware that a majority of our important crops rely on native bees, including squashes, pumpkins, tomatoes, blueberries, cranberries, and sunflowers. According to the United States Geological Survey (USGS), for 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, which don't need a pollinator, have a higher yield if visited by bees.² To put it simply, native pollinators are critical to sustain food production for humans and wildlife that support the food web. When we plant native plants, we are helping to sustain our native pollinators and ultimately ourselves.

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

Most of our native pollinators and other wildlife species have coevolved to need native plants. Between 20%-45% of native bees require specific native plants.⁴ Many people are now aware that without milkweed, Monarch butterflies will not reproduce. These once abundant, iconic butterflies are now threatened with extinction. This same story exists for countless species throughout the plant and animal kingdoms, 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 is because they lack the food they need in the form of a native plant. Over centuries, we have removed native trees and other plants, then installed 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, which are frequently deep rooted, help with storm water management, sediment control, and Chesapeake Bay health.

Increasingly Americans are gaining an understanding of the connection between native plants and wildlife. In 2022, one in three (34%) American adults reported buying a plant to benefit wildlife, up from 26% in 2020.⁵ Marylanders, like other Americans, want to help. A commemorative month is a great way to continue to raise the public's awareness and gain support for native plants.

Furthermore, the predictability of an annual commemorative month will provide Maryland nurseries with enough notice to grow and promote native plants, and will increase voluntary participation by Maryland growers and retailers. This commemorative month will help educate Marylanders and assist state businesses to address a developing consumer market opportunity that also happens to be important for the environment.

For the reasons provided, we respectfully request a favorable report on HB 368.

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¹ 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>

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

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Fallon, Caitlyn, "Consumer Gardening Report Finds One in Three People Turning to Native Plants, Gardening for Wildlife" *The National Wildlife Federation*, May 2, 2022