

Bill Number: HB368

Committee: Health and Government Operations Committee

Date: March 13, 2025

Dear Chair [Pena-Melnyk](#) and Members of the Committee:

In 2023 and 2024, in response to a request by the Maryland clubs of The Garden Club of America (GCA), Governor Moore issued a Proclamation declaring April as Maryland Native Plant Month. Moreover, GCA clubs across the country also advocated for a Native Plant Awareness Month; an effort that resulted in 42 states securing gubernatorial proclamations and six additional states passing laws establishing permanent Commemorative Native Plant Months in their states.

The reason for the broad support is simple. We are experiencing a stunning decline in species, including the pollinators that pollinate food that we eat. Of the roughly eight million species on earth, scientists estimate that at least one million will be extinct by 2050.

The Center for Biological Diversity conducted a systematic review of the status of all 4,337 North American and Hawaiian native bees. Their key findings: among native bee species with sufficient data to assess (1,437), more than half (749) are declining, nearly 1 in 4 (347 native bee species) is imperiled and at increasing risk of extinction. For many of the bee species lacking sufficient population data, it's likely they are also declining or at risk of extinction.ⁱ

In a more recent report butterflies, another important pollinator, are also showing precipitous declines. "The United States has 650 butterfly species, but 96 species were so sparse they didn't show up in the data and another 212 species weren't found in sufficient number to calculate trends, said study lead author Collin Edwards, an ecologist and data scientist at the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife."ⁱⁱ

While the reasons for these declines are multifold, nearly all of us can provide habitat for our pollinators and other wildlife by planting native plants.

HB0368 will establish a permanent commemorative Native Plant Month every May in Maryland.

A Proclamation has to be renewed every year and that uncertainty makes it challenging for businesses to plan adequate inventory to meet potential increased consumer demand. Conversely, a law creates predictability, generates confidence, and

incentivizes retail nurseries, wholesalers and growers to plan sufficient inventory to meet this heightened enthusiastic public interest in native plants.

Further, the predictability inherent in a law makes it easier for community and environmental groups, clubs, and others to plan ahead and create engaging, hands-on fun activities that educate citizens about *how* and *why* incorporating more natives into our landscapes is essential to the health and preservation of our local ecosystems. Our native pollinator birds, bees, butterflies, bats and insects have evolved alongside our native plants and they depend on those natives for their nourishment and preservation. We need to reverse the significant decline in our native pollinator species.

HB0368 is both an economic bill and an environmental bill that will generate significant economic benefits to businesses across our state. Incorporating more natives into our landscapes leads to:

- improved water quality benefiting Maryland's recreational and tourism businesses, seafood industries and watermen whose livelihoods depend on a healthier Chesapeake Bay to nourish our native blue crab and rockfish populations for which Maryland is so famous;
- an increase in pollinators for farmers who rely on native bees for pollination of many crops grown for human consumption. More native pollinators = higher crop yields;
- increased business for nursery retailers, wholesalers, growers and related trades such as landscapers, landscape designers, landscape architects, farmers markets and more.

A nice added benefit, HB0368 complements the 2023 Maryland Native Plants Program. Maryland is home to a thriving nursery industry with 313 operations and sales of more than \$1 billion (in 2018 dollars) according to Maryland Department of Agriculture. This is a great way to support Maryland's locally grown native plants.

HB0368, Maryland Native Plant Month, introduced to your committee by Delegate Michele Guyton is bipartisan, great for our environment, a boon to local businesses, requires zero government funding, and has no imposed mandates. It's a win-win bill with no downsides.

We respectfully request a favorable report on HB 368. The undersigned organizations and individuals support this bill.

Sincerely,

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ⁱ Bees in Peril, Center for Biological Diversity, February 2017

ⁱⁱ Butterfly populations are plummeting across the United States
Science 6, March 2025 <https://www.science.org/content/article/butterfly-populations-are-plummeting-across-united-states>