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Susan O'Neill, Chair

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Testimony in Support of
House Bill 368 – General Provisions - Commemorative Month - Maryland Native Plant Month
House Health and Government Operations Committee
March 13, 2025

The Rural Maryland Council supports House Bill 368 – General Provisions - Commemorative Month - Maryland Native Plant Month. This bill requires the Governor to annually proclaim May as Maryland Native Plant Month. The proclamation will acknowledge the benefits that native plants provide to Maryland's natural environment. Additionally, it will encourage educational and environmental organizations, as well as businesses, to properly observe Maryland Native Plant Month.

The Maryland Native Plant Month highlights the Maryland Native Plant Program, with the program's primary purpose being to:

- (1) ENCOURAGE AND PROMOTE THE INCREASING DEMAND FOR, USE OF, AND SALE OF NATIVE PLANTS BY RETAIL GARDEN CENTERS, RETAIL NURSERIES, AND WHOLESALE NURSERIES; AND
- (2) EDUCATE THE PUBLIC, LANDSCAPERS, AND OTHER PLANT USERS ON THE IMPORTANCE, BENEFIT, AND AVAILABILITY OF NATIVE PLANTS.

The Maryland Native Plant Program is dedicated to promoting the use of native plants in landscaping and restoration projects across the state. This initiative aims to enhance biodiversity, support local wildlife, and foster ecological resilience. One of its key resources is the Commercial Native Plant List, which features approved nurseries and vendors that supply a variety of native species. This list not only helps consumers find reliable sources for native plants but also encourages sustainable landscaping practices that benefit the environment. By supporting the use of native flora, the program contributes to the conservation of Maryland's unique ecosystems.

Establishing a Native Plant Month in Maryland could significantly boost the local economy by increasing awareness and demand for native plants. By promoting events, workshops, and educational campaigns throughout the month, residents would be encouraged to purchase native plants for their gardens, which in turn supports local nurseries and garden centers. Additionally, fostering a connection between the community and native flora can stimulate landscape design services, gardening supplies, and eco-friendly landscaping practices. This initiative not only enhances biodiversity and supports local ecosystems but also creates a thriving market centered around sustainable gardening and conservation efforts.

Additionally, Maryland Native Plant Month can serve as an opportunity for rural communities to engage in educational programs that highlight the importance of native flora. Workshops, events, and partnerships with local schools and organizations can empower residents to take pride in their environment, encouraging sustainable practices that benefit both our agricultural heritage and natural landscapes.

The Rural Maryland Council respectfully requests your favorable support of House Bill 368.

The Rural Maryland Council (RMC) is an independent state agency governed by a nonpartisan, 40-member board that consists of inclusive representation from the federal, state, regional, county, and municipal governments, as well as the for-profit and nonprofit sectors. We bring together federal, state, county, and municipal government officials as well as representatives of the for-profit and nonprofit sectors to identify challenges unique to rural communities and to craft public policy, programmatic, or regulatory solutions.

"A Collective Voice for Rural Maryland"