



Testimony: SB284, Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act of 2026  
Sections of Interest: University System of Maryland Fiscal 2027 Budget  
Committee: Budget and Taxation  
Hearing Date: March 4, 2026  
Position: Favorable with Amendments

Dear Chair Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe, and Honorable Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Native Plant Coalition urges you to reinstate the \$150,000 allocated to the Maryland Native Plants Program (MNPP) for the University of Maryland Extension (UME). This funding covers the cost for the position of the Native Plants and Landscape Specialist, who was hired in September 2024. With this amendment, the Coalition's position on the University System of Maryland Fiscal 2027 Budget is Favorable with Amendment.

The 2026 Budget Bill (HB0390) and the Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act of 2026 (HB0392) would cut all funding for the MNPP and for the UME Specialist position. This appropriations loss is also described in the University System of Maryland Fiscal 2027 Budget Overview (R30B).

In 2023, MGA passed SB0836 (Senator Brooks) and HB0950 (Delegate Stein) to create the MNPP and appropriated (1) \$150,000 to fund a new UME Specialist position; and (2) \$100,000 for staff and marketing costs at the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA). For FY 2026, MDA decided to forgo its allocation because the Maryland's Best staff and marketing programs already in place could be repurposed.

The MNPP is providing significant and irreplaceable support to the State's horticultural industry and consumers. The UME Specialist has been instrumental in starting up and continuing to expand the program. Further, she has leveraged her efforts many times over at no additional cost by collaborating with the Maryland Native Plant Society, MDA, and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources.

The MNPP provides vital support to the growing native plant business, which is part of Maryland's \$2 billion horticulture industry. The MNPP is expected to generate an extremely high Return on Investment (ROI) due to higher horticulture industry revenues and the non-reimbursed expenses for the collaborators.

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A 2025 Market Report Survey from Nursery Management, a top national trade publication, found that 82% of responding nurseries are seeing an increase in demand for native plants, with natives comprising 46% of average inventory.

The MNPP and the UME Specialist provide key support to this growing industry and its eager customers. With high pent-up demand for native plants, the public is showing considerable interest in the MNPP, including the Commercial Maryland Native Plant List of over 675 plants and the newly Certified Native Plant Nurseries. Although only part of the program's social media was tracked, it reached an audience of over 85,000 during its start-up year.

The 2026 Budget Bill and the Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act of 2026 would remove all funding for the MNPP after FY 2026. This relatively minor cut would make little difference in the total university budget, but would eliminate the UME Specialist's job and completely stop the MNPP and all of its significant benefits.

In Governor Moore's presentation of his FY 2027 Budget, he stressed our challenging times, with cuts in federal funding and the loss of 25,000 federal jobs in Maryland. In this economic climate, the preservation of a state job with the potential for a high ROI should be a priority. Additionally, the small annual \$150,000 appropriation for the MNPP will reap great rewards for our state for years to come as the vital work and accomplishments of the MNPP continue.

The Maryland Native Plant Coalition respectfully urges you to retain the \$150,000 in UME funding to support the Maryland Native Plant Program and the job of the UME Specialist. Without this allocation, the entire program will cease to exist.

Judy Fulton  
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Member, Maryland Native Plant Coalition  
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Attachments:

University of Maryland, Continue Funding the Maryland Native Plant Program HB950/SB836  
(Accomplishments and Plans)

Maryland Nursery, Landscape, and Greenhouse Association (MNLGA), Support for Continued Funding  
of the Maryland Native Plants Program (MNPP)

Chesapeake Horticultural Services, Support for Continued Funding of the Maryland Native Plants  
Program (MNPP)

## Continue Funding the Maryland Native Plant Program HB950/SB836

The Maryland Native Plant Program (MNPP) was established to simultaneously grow supply and demand for native plants, creating a thriving, stable market. It is the first of its kind in the nation. By focusing on native flora, the program reduces the spread of invasive species, improves water quality, and provides habitat for local wildlife, contributing to healthier and more climate-resilient communities. The MNPP advances MD's economic and sustainability objectives, while positioning the state as a regional and national leader in the green industry. ***Without funding, the Extension position supported by this bill will be eliminated, jeopardizing the significant progress made in just 17 months.***

### Highlights of What Has Been Accomplished by UME Specialist

- Created authoritative resources—the [1st of three ecoregion plant guides \(Piedmont\)](#) released fall '25 has over 8K views, 2K downloads, and 1K hard copies sold. It's being considered for an Extension Materials Award (book category) by the American Society of Horticultural Science. The comprehensive [Commercial Maryland Native Plant list](#) continues to evolve with 923 unique users.
- Increased availability of native plants—since the launch of the MDA's Best Native Plants Certification last April, Extension's MNPP specialist [certified 33 nurseries](#), and after hosting a booth at the largest trade show in the mid-Atlantic, in partnership with the MDA, is currently assisting an additional dozen to meet the qualifications.
- Expanded learning opportunities for industry professionals—7 different native plant presentations eligible for IPM and Landscape Architect CEU's were given to 1,194 participants. Recurring native plant articles in MNLGA's trade journal reach 300+ MD businesses, employing 15K+ Marylanders.
- Grew demand for native plants through education—512 Master Gardeners (MG) received training. Over 5K Marylanders were reached via speaking engagements, recurring articles in UME's blogs, and 'Branching Out' newsletter. In 2026, [Natives at Noon: Lunch & Learn Webinar Series](#) inaugural presentation had 370 participants. Post-surveys showed 8.6 out of 10 planned to implement what they learned.
- Secured funding for native plant research—a 2026-2027 ~\$20K MAES grant was awarded to evaluate use of assertive natives to manage invasive plants. As Co-Principal Investigator, 2 USDA grants are under review: evaluating native plants for the cut flower industry, and using native plants to attract natural enemies of crapemyrtle bark scale.

### Let's Not Lose Momentum, We're Just Getting Started!

- Designing resources for the future—The 2nd in the series of ecoregion plant guides (Coastal Plain) is under development and the 3rd in the series (Mountain Region) is slated for 2027. In partnership with UMD's iConsultancy, the Commercial List is currently being converted into two user-friendly interfaces: a searchable database, and an interactive plant tool kit for designers, stormwater practitioners, and gardeners.
- Laying the groundwork for a local native seed industry—9 county Extension offices are participating in the emergent 'MD Native Seed & Plant Program,' a statewide initiative that leverages the collective expertise, time, and financial resources of MG County Coordinators to maximize our impact. Seed increase demo plots, workshops, and multimedia resources will provide Maryland growers an alternative, high-value specialty crop.
- Increasing accessibility to native plants—The MD Native Seed & Plant Program will also serve the general public. Local seed harvesting, cleaning, and storage workshops, as well as propagation workshops will provide a source of free native plant materials to underserved communities.
- Going beyond the basics—Creating programs such as a 'Master Native Plants Program' for both industry professionals in partnership with the Chesapeake Bay Landscape Professionals and a general public version. Also, new citizen science projects such as 'Assertive Natives Allies' and 'Backyard Botany Quest.'
- Building regional partnerships—Expanding collaborations with other land grant institutions and nonprofit orgs with a similar mission positioning ourselves for large multistate grants to implement big ideas on a regional scale. For example, a Mid-Atlantic seed hub and reimagining how new developments are landscaped.

### Return of Investment for the State

While it is too early to provide economic impacts for this fledgling program, the MNPP plays a pivotal role in supporting Maryland's \$2B horticultural industry by expanding and creating new growth opportunities for businesses. Native flora and green infrastructure also saves the State money by minimizing the costly impacts of invasive species management and flooding. The MNPP is a smart investment for Maryland.



# MARYLAND

NURSERY, LANDSCAPE  
AND GREENHOUSE  
ASSOCIATION, INC.

February 1, 2026

Re: Support for Continued Funding of the Maryland Native Plants Program (MNPP)

On behalf of the Maryland Nursery, Landscape, and Greenhouse Association (MNLGA), I am writing to express our strong support for the continued funding and implementation of the Maryland Native Plants Program (MNPP). We understand there are considerations to reduce or eliminate funding for this initiative, and we urge you to maintain financial support for this vital program that benefits Maryland's environment, economy, and green industry.

The MNLGA represents more than 300 member businesses encompassing Maryland's nursery, landscape, and greenhouse sectors. Collectively, these businesses employ over 15,000 Marylanders and contribute approximately \$2 billion annually to the state's economy. Our members range from family-owned nurseries and garden centers to large-scale growers, landscape contractors, and allied suppliers. As stewards of the environment and front-line providers of plant material across Maryland, we are deeply invested in the responsible production and promotion of native plants.

Since its inception, the MNPP has played a crucial role in coordinating native plant education, outreach, and availability, ensuring that correct information and quality plant material reach consumers, landscapers, and institutions alike. The program's early accomplishments—such as developing plant lists, creating educational resources, and collaborating with industry professionals to promote native species—reflect a significant investment of time, expertise, and public-private partnership.

Cutting funding now would jeopardize these initial successes and undercut years of progress made by numerous stakeholders. Reducing support at this critical stage would create instability in a sector that is just beginning to realize its full potential for environmental and economic returns.

We urge the State to sustain full funding for the MNPP as a means to:

- Promote biodiversity and pollinator health through increased landscape use of native species;
- Strengthen Maryland's horticultural economy by supporting locally grown, native plant production;
- Provide consumers with reliable information and accessible native plant sources;
- Advance the State's environmental stewardship and climate resiliency goals.

The MNLGA stands ready to continue collaborating with State leaders to ensure that the Maryland Native Plants Program thrives as a model of cooperative, sustainable progress.

Thank you for your time and for your continued commitment to Maryland's environmental and economic health.

Sincerely,  
**Vanessa A. Finney**  
Vanessa A. Finney

Vanessa A. Finney, Executive Director

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February 26, 2026

**Re: Support for Continued Funding of the Maryland Native Plants Program (MNPP)**

I am writing to express my strong support for continued funding of the Maryland Native Plants Program (MNPP). With the understanding that there are considerations to reduce or eliminate funding for the MNPP, although possibly as an unintentional budget adjustment, I urge you to maintain the current level of financial support for this essential program benefiting the environment and economy of our beautiful state. **The MNPP plays a significant role by promoting biodiversity and pollinator health through increased landscape use of native species, strengthening Maryland's horticultural economy by supporting locally grown native plant production, providing consumers with reliable information and accessible native plant sources, and advancing the State's environmental stewardship and climate resiliency goals.**

Chesapeake Horticultural Services works with dozens of members of Maryland's green industry who produce and promote the use of native plants, as well as regional and national non-profit organizations dedicated to educating the public to become more engaged stewards of our environment by gardening with native plants. This work includes sharing critical information about the use of native plants and avoidance of invasive species provided by the MNPP. Additionally, I dedicate hours of volunteer board service to the Maryland Nursery, Landscape, and Greenhouse Association, the Chesapeake Bay Landscape Professional program, and the Maryland Native Plant Society Eastern Shore Chapter, all of whom work in partnership with and stand in strong support of the MNPP.

The MNPP has hit the ground running from day one, playing a key role in coordinating native plant education, outreach, and availability, ensuring that correct information and quality plant material reach consumers, landscapers, and institutions alike. Already since its recent inception, the program has done an incredible amount of work developing plant lists, creating educational resources, and collaborating with industry professionals to promote native species. **This significant investment of time, expertise, and public-private partnership should not be cut short by a budget shortfall, as the loss of the MNPP's expertise and materials under development would surely be of greater economic loss.**

Your time and continued commitment to Maryland's environmental and economic health is greatly appreciated. If you have any questions regarding this letter of support, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Leslie Hunter Cario  
Principal/Owner

