



Testimony of the Mayor and Council of Rockville
SB 266 – Local Government – Regulatory Powers – Regulation of Tree of
Heaven
SUPPORT

Good afternoon, Chair Feldman and members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee. I am Rockville City Councilmember Marissa Valeri, and I thank you for this opportunity to share the City's comments on SB 266. We are thankful to Senator Brooks for sponsoring this important legislation.

The Rockville Mayor and Council unanimously support SB 266. This bill authorizes municipalities and counties to regulate Tree of Heaven, including prohibiting a person from selling, planting, and allowing it to grow on a person's property. The bill also provides authority to municipalities and counties to establish a bounty program to incentivize the removal of this invasive species. According to the University of Maryland Extension, by 2025, Tree of Heaven was found in all Maryland counties, except Somerset County. SB 266 is needed to combat the rapid spread of Tree of Heaven, which has caused significant damage throughout Maryland by invading forests, crowding out native plants, and damaging infrastructure.

We support the provisions of SB 266 for the following reasons:

- It provides local governments with additional tools to mitigate the prevalence of Tree of Heaven, an invasive species that threatens native plants and wildlife, reducing biodiversity.
- It aligns with Rockville's Climate Action goals to manage and reduce invasive species in parks, streams, and natural areas to protect biodiversity and improve ecosystem resilience, and promote native plantings to mitigate the spread of invasive species.
- Tree of Heaven is the primary host for the spotted lanternfly, an invasive insect that poses a major threat to the ecosystem and important regional agricultural economies.
- Allowing the regulation of Tree of Heaven supports biodiversity and climate resilience by promoting the use of native plants, which the Maryland Invasive Species Council deemed essential for climate resilience, stormwater management, and wildlife habitat.

SB 266 is an important step forward in invasive species management. Regulating Tree of Heaven is not only an environmental issue, but is also an economic, infrastructure, and public safety imperative. For these reasons, we urge the Committee to provide SB 266 with a favorable report. Thank you.