

Mary Ellen Pease-Scheeler

Lead State Advocate for Native Plant Month

Representing All Maryland Clubs of the Garden Club of America

SB229 - Maryland Native Plant Month March 10, 2026

FAVORABLE

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Mary Ellen Pease-Scheeler. I am writing to urge you to vote in favor of establishing a permanent recurring commemorative Maryland Native Plant Month every May in the state of Maryland.

This initiative began in 2022 when the Garden Club of America launched a national campaign to establish a Native Plant Awareness Month in every state and the District of Columbia. As of 2025, 44 states and DC had observed a native plant month proclamation, with 11 states converting it to permanent law. I am here today to ask that Maryland join them — and to make the case that there has never been a more important moment to do so.

SB 229 is a zero-cost, zero-mandate bill. It creates no new programs and requires no new spending. Instead it creates a permanent, annual statewide marketing campaign — timed to the height of planting season — that gives businesses, community groups, congregations, youth organizations, master gardeners, and watershed stewards a predictable window to plan hands-on, fun & engaging activities such as installing pollinator gardens, rain gardens, tree plantings, and living shorelines. **That public engagement, multiplied across the state every May, generates real and measurable economic and environmental returns.**

A Strong Economic Case

A permanent Native Plant Month directly boosts local horticulture businesses — wholesale and retail growers, nurseries, landscapers, and garden centers — by creating predictable annual demand. It supports the Department of Agriculture's Maryland's Best Native Plants Certified Growers Program and keeps nearly every dollar spent in state. Permanent annual proclamations also give nurseries the business certainty they need to invest in growing more inventory and hiring seasonal staff.

Maryland's **seafood** industry is worth **\$600M**. Our **tourism** sector generates **\$21B** and **Maryland's agriculture** sector tops **\$3B**. Every one of these industries depend on clean waterways, healthy pollinators, and thriving ecosystems — and native plants are the 'little engine' that will help keep it all running. *Who knew.....???*

Native plants' deep, fibrous root systems stabilize soils, filter excess nutrients and sediment, and dramatically reduce the runoff that fuels toxic algae blooms and dead zones in our streams, rivers and iconic Chesapeake Bay. Excess nutrient and sediment is one of the biggest contributors to pollution in our waters where it destroys habitat for our world-famous blue crabs, rockfish and seafood: it smothers important underwater seagrasses by

causing rapid drops in dissolved oxygen that deprive our aquatic ecosystems of all life. These destructive conditions are not uncommon and they too often limit recreational water activities, force beach closings, and trigger Unsafe Water Advisories - not good conditions for our tourism sector!

Many Maryland farmers depend on pollinators for crop production. Planting more natives is the single most effective action we can take to reverse pollinator decline and protect the **\$3B agricultural economy** that depends on them.

Advancing Governor Moore's Green Jobs of the Future and Workforce Development Goals

SB 229 directly supports Governor Moore's vision for a thriving Green Economy in Maryland. By raising public awareness of native plants and the practices that depend on them, this bill encourages careers in horticulture, ecological restoration, Green Stormwater Infrastructure, and nature-based Best Management Practices — the climate solution tools of the future. It aligns with and amplifies existing workforce initiatives including the Maryland Climate Crew Network, MarylandCorps Service Year Options, and the Chesapeake Conservation and Climate Corps (to name just a few). A permanent Native Plant Awareness Month creates an annual pipeline of public interest, volunteer engagement, and community investment that feeds directly into the green workforce Maryland is working to build.

A Powerful Environmental Tool — At No Cost to Taxpayers

Native plants are foundational to modern Green Stormwater Infrastructure and Best Management Practices. Their powerful root systems — in tandem with green infrastructure — absorb substantially more stormwater than conventional landscaping, reducing strain on existing grey infrastructure and minimizing costly government spending on erosion control and flood damage repair. They help recharge groundwater and capture CO2 and other air pollutants that harm human health.

Maryland's Extraordinary Volunteer Force

Maryland is uniquely positioned to leverage this opportunity. Thousands of trained volunteers — master gardeners, watershed stewards, land stewards, and community conservation groups — are already on the ground installing these very practices. DNR and our Climate Resilience agencies already partner with these groups through programs like Tree-Mendous Maryland, MD Environmental Trust Land Stewards, and Roots for Resilience to deliver green infrastructure at a fraction of what it would cost the state. According to the 2025 Independent Sector Report,* Maryland volunteers contributed labor valued at \$35.53 per hour. A permanent Native Plant Month — aligned with the height of planting season — gives all of these partners a coordinated, statewide campaign to recruit, organize, and multiply their impact every single May, *saving Maryland millions of dollars in labor that would otherwise fall to taxpayers.*

Why Now?

Unfortunately, our coordinated efforts to restore the Bay have underperformed. Federal funding for climate resilience is being eliminated. FEMA disaster relief is being gutted. EPA protections are being rolled back. Maryland cannot afford to wait for Washington.

This bill costs nothing, mandates nothing, and puts the power to protect our environment and our economy directly in the hands of Maryland communities, businesses, and the extraordinary volunteer workforce already doing this work.

SB 229 is a simple, elegant, and powerful idea. It costs the state nothing and delivers everything — cleaner water, healthier ecosystems, stronger local businesses, green jobs, and a more resilient Maryland. I urge this committee to give it a favorable vote.

Respectfully submitted,

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