



## HB 217 and SB 229 Maryland Native Plant Month

### TESTIMONY of DR. MARK SOUTHERLAND for VERNAL POOL PARTNERS -- **Favorable**

I received a Ph.D. and Smithsonian Fellowship in freshwater ecology and have consulted for federal, state, and local agencies on water resource issues for 35 years. I am the founder of **Vernal Pool Partners** and have served with the Maryland Academy of Sciences' Science Council, Maryland Water Monitoring Council, Howard County Environmental Sustainability Board, Howard County Conservancy, Patapsco Heritage Greenway, and Safe Skies Maryland.

Native plants improve water quality and Bay health by absorbing stormwater runoff and filtering excess nutrients, pollution, and sediment.

Native plants supports our biodiversity by providing critical habitat and the primary food source for much of our wildlife, including the state's native pollinators.

Maryland's \$3-billion agriculture industry relies heavily on pollination services—many of which are provided not by managed honeybees, but by native bee species. Of the 100 crop species that supply 90% of the world's nutrition, more than 70 depend on bee pollination. Many common crops grown in Maryland—such as squash, pumpkins, tomatoes, and blueberries—are pollinated most effectively by native bees, a fact that remains largely unknown to the public. Even crops that do not strictly require pollination, including cotton, soybeans, and peppers, show increased yields when visited by bees. Yet despite their importance, once-abundant native pollinators are in steep decline. A large North American study found that more than half of native bee species are in decline, and nearly one in four is now imperiled and at growing risk of extinction. While the reasons for the decline in pollinators are complex, expanding the use of native plants is one of the most effective, accessible actions individuals, landowners, and local governments can take to support pollinator populations and strengthen ecological resilience.

The Time is Now. By designating Maryland Native Plant Month, the state will accelerate the protection and adoption of native landscaping needed to increase critical biodiversity, maintain local agriculture, and reduce pollution to our streams, rivers, and Chesapeake Bay.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark Southerland", is written over a large, light-colored oval shape.