

Testimony: SB266, Local Government - Regulatory Powers - Regulation of Tree of Heaven

Submitted by: Jill Fonda Allen, CGC, Brookeville, Maryland

Committee: Education, Energy and the Environment

Hearing Date: February 10, 2026

Position: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and honorable members of the Committee:

As a retired certified genetic counselor, Montgomery Parks Weed Warrior, and Wild Ones member, I support SB 266 with the sponsor amendments, which enables Maryland counties and municipalities to manage and control tree of heaven and any invasive trees regulated by the Maryland Department of Agriculture.

As a biologist who studied genetics, I can clearly recognize the destructive impact non-native invasive trees and other plants can have on our environment. Our native trees, birds and insects co-evolved, forming a complex web of relationships. When we plant a tree of heaven or other invasive plant, this system of relationships is disrupted. Native plants are threatened. Our native birds and insects are deprived of the food, shelter, and nesting sites that they require to thrive. Further, by definition, invasive trees “invade” the system, and so out-compete and eventually replace native trees. Given enough non-native invasive trees and time, our ecosystems will struggle and perhaps fail.

As a Weed Warrior, I see this invasion first hand. Before my Weed Warrior training, I was not able to identify individual invasive trees and other plants in the parks, and to me the forest was simply green. This is often called plant blindness. Since my training, I see the pervasive presence of invasive trees and other plants introduced from gardens and landscapes. It’s frustrating to work so hard as a volunteer and continue to see invasive plants being added to the gardens and landscaping next to the parks. I feel overwhelmed at the enormity of the problem and don’t want to leave this behind for the next generation.

As a citizen, I can imagine the high cost of trying to control invasive trees. In 2024, the Montgomery County Council recognized Montgomery Parks’ Weed Warrior volunteers for environmental stewardship. The Council reported that in 2024 Weed Warriors volunteered over 13,700 hours and saved almost 20,000 native trees and shrubs from invasive vines. The value of this volunteer time in dollars equates to nearly \$500,000.

I visited Virginia’s Sky Line Drive in 1985, forty years ago, and went to one of their beautiful nature centers. An educational poster on display predicted that invasive species were possibly the number one threat to our environment. At the time, I didn’t understand how invasive species could overwhelm our forests and natural areas. However, as more data has been collected, I now see how true the prediction was. A June 2023 Washington Post article reported that Shenandoah National Park estimated they would need \$27 million to address invasive plants in the park, an impossible task with an annual budget of only \$20 million, especially because 80% of the budget is needed to cover fixed costs.

Testimony: SB 266, Local Government - Regulatory Powers - Regulation of Tree of Heaven
Submitted by: Jill Fonda Allen, CGC, Brookeville, Maryland
Page 2

I am so proud of our state for updating our invasive plant law in 2024, which will greatly help in decreasing the number of invasive plants coming into our gardens and parks. SB 266 will enable our state's counties and municipalities to take the next steps in reducing the harm from this invasion as well as replace invasives with natives to mitigate this threat to our environment.

Thank you Senator Brooks for introducing this bill. I wholeheartedly support its passage and therefore request a favorable vote with sponsor amendments on SB 266.

Respectfully submitted,

Jill Fonda Allen, MS, CGC

REFERENCES:

The Maryland-National Capital Parks and Planning Commission. Accessed 2/1/26. VSO-Weed Warrior. [VSO - Weed Warriors - Montgomery Parks](#)
Dana Milbank. June 30, 2023. "Opinion: How I learned to love toxic chemicals".
(<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/06/30/herbicide-invasive-plants-national-parks-shenandoah>)