



Wes Moore, Governor  
Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor  
Josh Kurtz, Secretary  
David Goshorn, Deputy Secretary

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April 1, 2026

**BILL NUMBER: SENATE BILL 266 – THIRD READER**

**SHORT TITLE: LOCAL GOVERNMENT-REGULATORY POWERS-REGULATION OF INVASIVE TREES**

**DEPARTMENT’S POSITION: SUPPORT**

### **EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT’S POSITION**

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The Department supports SB266 due to its potential to improve ecological protection of native species in areas experiencing high environmental stressors. Tree of Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*) is an exceptionally aggressive invasive species that rapidly outcompetes native trees and understory plants that provide essential habitat and food resources for wildlife. Its exceptionally rapid growth rate and ability to produce viable seed within two to three years enable it to outcompete in urban forests and natural areas within a short timeframe.

The Department supports the bill’s amendments, as they expand the bill’s scope from regulating only Tree of Heaven to including all Listed Invasive Trees on the Maryland Prohibited Invasive Plant List. The amendments also introduce section (F), which requires bounty or native tree replacement programs to ensure invasive trees are properly identified and removed or eradicated according to professionally accepted methods or University of Maryland Extension methodology. These new provisions strengthen the framework for local management and address concerns regarding proper implementation and eradication techniques raised during the fiscal note process.

By authorizing local governments to regulate and incentivize the removal of Tree of Heaven, the bill strengthens invasive species management at the community level, supporting forest resilience and long-term ecological health.

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

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Tree of Heaven is widely recognized as a highly invasive deciduous tree species throughout North America, capable of forming dense stands that displace native vegetation while releasing soil chemicals that inhibit the growth of surrounding plants.

In addition to its direct ecological impacts, Tree of Heaven serves as the preferred host for the spotted lanternfly, another invasive species responsible for agricultural damage and increased stress on native plant communities statewide.

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Urban forests and environmentally stressed areas are particularly vulnerable to infestation, where native species already face challenges related to soil compaction, heat, limited rooting space, and pollution. Without careful, thorough, proactive management, infestations can spread rapidly following the introduction of a single specimen.

## **BILL EXPLANATION**

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SB 266 amends the Local Government Article to authorize counties and municipalities to adopt ordinances regulating Tree of Heaven, Listed Invasive Trees, or invasive bamboo.

- Prohibit the sale and planting of Tree of Heaven or other Listed Invasive Trees;
- Require property owners to prevent Tree of Heaven or other Listed Invasive Trees from growing on their land;
- Enforce ordinances through mitigation requirements and civil fines; and
- Establish bounty or native tree replacement programs to incentivize the removal and eradication of Tree of Heaven and other Listed Invasive Trees.
- Require bounty or native tree replacement programs to mandate proper identification and eradication consistent with University of Maryland Extension methodology.

The legislation expands existing local authority that currently applies to invasive bamboo to include listed invasive trees as a regulated invasive species.

This bill would provide local governments with tools to implement education, enforcement, and removal programs that can yield significant long-term ecological benefits and reduce the spread of invasive trees across Maryland's landscape, including *Ailanthus altissima*.