

## HB 72 SUPPORT

### Natural Resources - Edible Forests and Foraging Program - Establishment

#### Environment and Transportation Committee

February 4th, 2026

Good afternoon Chair Korman, Vice Chair Guyton, and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee:

My name is Kyle Farmer and I am testifying favorably in regards to House Bill 72.

I am the Vice President of the Permaculture Club at Montgomery College. Our mission is to extend knowledge regarding foraging and food security to our student body and surrounding communities. As of May 2024, 40% of the student body at Montgomery College is experiencing food insecurity <sup>1</sup>. The Permaculture Club began to tackle this issue head on, specifically on the Takoma Park - Silver Spring campus, and have transformed 33,000 square feet of what was once just grass into a Community Food Forest <sup>2</sup>. In these areas, we have created an environment where people can get hands-on experience foraging for foods found all over the State of Maryland.

Since the Permaculture Club was founded in 2023, we have had a substantial amount of interest and engagement from students and those in our surrounding communities, eager to learn about and try the foods that grow around them. We have had groups of up to 80 people at a time, from all over the DMV, come to listen and learn from some of the master foragers in our areas. These include: Francis Smith of the Department of Natural Resources, Ben Gritton of the REED Center in Frederick County, Bodhi Vasilopoulos of Forested in Bowie, and John Harper of the Mycological Association of Washington DC. We have had guests come from Baltimore City, Alexandria Virginia, and even Zimbabwe to come learn about foraging best practices and to get a taste of what our local environments have to offer.

For many, it was their first time being introduced to the amazing native food growing within Maryland. American persimmons, pawpaw's, black raspberries, native grapes, like muscadine, and Riverbank, and blueberries are just some of the amazing foods that are already growing within our state lands. When our visitors learned this, the message became clear: Marylanders are ready to forage. By allowing Marylanders access to the food that grows on state lands with this new permitting system, it increases the options that Marylanders have in regards to their own food resiliency. **Foraging for plants on the over 500,000 acres owned and managed by the Department of Natural Resources in the state of Maryland is currently prohibited, and House Bill 72 will not only make it legal, but ensure that it is accessible and regenerative.**

I urge a favorable report on HB 72 and thank you all for listening to my testimony today.