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Maryland Department of Agriculture

Legislative Comment

Date: February 17th, 2026

BILL NUMBER: House Bill 949
BILL TITLE: Agriculture - Noxious Weeds - Palmer Amaranth
MDA POSITION: INFORMATION

The Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) respectfully submits this letter of information for *House Bill 949 - Agriculture - Noxious Weeds - Palmer Amaranth*.

The Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) currently operates its Noxious Weed Program with a baseline staff of four Agricultural Inspectors. HB 949 mandates a new, rigorous enforcement regime for *Palmer amaranth* (*Amaranthus palmeri*) that requires inspections every 14 days following an infestation report. To achieve this, the Department requires a 175% increase in field staff and significant new capital equipment to avoid operational failure.

The efficacy of HB 949 is fundamentally limited by the biology of the weed. Unlike traditional noxious weeds (e.g., Thistles or Johnsongrass), Palmer amaranth is a hyper-aggressive "pigweed" which under Maryland summer conditions, the plant can grow 2–3 inches per day. Chemical efficacy drops by 80% once the plant exceeds 4 inches. Because the bill mandates a 14-day inspection window, a seedling that is 1 inch tall on Monday will be 29–43 inches tall (and likely producing seed) by the next mandated inspection. Populations in Maryland have already demonstrated resistance to both Glyphosate (Group 9) and ALS-inhibitors (Group 2), making "eradication" within two weeks biologically improbable for many farmers without intensive manual labor.

The bill requires the Department to issue an order to the landowner, though in Maryland's modern agricultural landscape, over 40% of Maryland farmland is leased. Many owners are out-of-state entities or non-farming heirs. By the time a "Certified Mail" notice reaches a landowner in another state, and they contact their tenant farmer, the 14-day eradication window has often already closed.

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Without supplemental staff and equipment funding, MDA cannot meet the bi-weekly inspection mandate. The Department is prepared to discuss how to scale this program to protect Maryland's \$8 billion agricultural footprint while simultaneously taking a firmer position to combat Palmer amaranth.

MDA appreciates the consideration of the above information in the Committee's deliberations.