



February 26, 2024

Agriculture - Invasive Plant Species - Regulation (Biodiversity and Agriculture Protection Act) (HB 979)

Position: FAVORABLE

Dear Chair Korman, Vice Chair Boyce, and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee:

Blue Water Baltimore's mission is to protect and restore the quality of Baltimore's rivers, streams, and Harbor to foster a healthy environment, a strong economy, and thriving communities. A core part of our restoration strategy is operating our Herring Run Nursery, which specializes in plants native to Maryland and the Chesapeake Bay watershed. **We write today in favor of the Biodiversity and Agriculture Protection Act (HB979).**

Our non-profit Nursery offers more than 250 native species of trees, shrubs, vines, flowers, and more to retail and wholesale customers alike. Native plants help reduce stormwater pollution entering the Chesapeake Bay by reducing nutrient runoff and requiring less chemical inputs than non-native plants. Native plants have deeper root systems than non-natives and are better at stabilizing soils and preventing sediment runoff. Native plants provide critical habitat and food for butterflies, birds, and pollinators. Ecosystem health is increasingly important with rising concerns over climate change and declining pollinator populations. Native plants are an integral part of a healthy and functioning ecosystem. The plants listed as Tier 1 and Tier 2 do not meet these criteria and are neither integral, nor a healthy part of our Chesapeake Bay ecosystem.

Since Maryland's initial invasive plant law was passed in 2011, only 6 plants have been prohibited from sale with another 13 on the Tier 2 list, meaning they are still permitted to be sold but must have a warning sign stating, "Plant with Caution". HB 979 will help broaden the invasive plants regulated by the law from only commercial terrestrial plants to terrestrial and aquatic plants, both commercial and non-commercial. In addition, it will eliminate the plant tier system, moving the current Tier 2 plants to Tier 1 (prohibited from sale). The plants on Tier 2 are just as invasive as those on Tier 1 but the "Maryland screen" did not prohibit selling any plant that had been in the state more than 50 years or was widely established.

HB 979 will decrease the number of invasive plant species in Maryland, while supporting the growth of local ecotype native plants and the native plant industry. With the amount of damage from invasive plants we are seeing in our forests, parks, waterways, roadsides, and neighborhoods every day, changes in the law are needed. This legislation proposes structural changes to bring our laws more in line with the invasive plant laws in neighboring states and will allow us to address invasives that are widely established in our state. **For these reasons, we urge the committee to issue a favorable report on HB 979.**

BLUE WATER BALTIMORE
CLEAN WATER. STRONG COMMUNITIES.

Sincerely,

Barbara Johnson
Community Advocacy Manager
Blue Water Baltimore