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Dear Maryland Senators,

I am writing in support of HB 322.

Though I recently moved, for years I lived in the Miramar Landing community in Middle River, where the HOA made a concerted effort, along with the Gunpowder Valley Conservancy, to get better control of water runoff, flooding, and pollution, by installing native gardens, planting trees, and building environmentally -friendly retention areas. As part of this effort, the HOA encouraged homeowners to build small “bayscapes” and rain gardens on their property, and encouraged “baywise” practices. Such lawn and garden practices are typically restricted by HOAs, much to the detriment of local wildlife populations, area storm drains, and the Chesapeake Bay.

As an example, leaving lawns just 1” longer than is standard can keep the lawn healthier, leading to less water usage. In addition, slightly longer grass holds more water and helps prevent runoff, and requires less chemical fertilizers. Additionally, gardens featuring native plants, which are often deemed “weeds” in many communities, help support vital insect and bird populations at a time those populations – the very base of the food chain – are dwindling precipitously.

As a volunteer and partner in the project in Miramar Landing, I was shocked to learn how much of an impact a single homeowner with a small garden and a few management changes could make. The same year we planted our rain garden, Monarch butterflies began laying their eggs there. We cut runoff from our property by around 25% (living right next to the storm drain, we could see this in action). After several years, between our garden and the community gardens behind our house, the Monarch population began to thrive – at the same time that national populations are so low that the species is being considered for the endangered species list. Native birds began to return and compete with the house sparrows and starlings. The lightning bug population has increased, much to the delight of neighborhood children. There was an increase in native bee populations (including a specialist bee whose whole life cycle depends on a single plant – native hibiscus, which we had in our garden). Our community went from being sterile to being full of life, rampant with opportunities to connect children to wildlife and nature even in the middle of a thriving and over-developed area. At the same time, with less runoff, and greater filtering of rainfall, we were directly impacting the health of local waterways leading to the bay.

The practices I learned through that project have come with me – there is no HOA at my new home, but we do live directly next to waterways leading to the Triadelphia reservoir. I’ve learned how to handle the lawn, how to landscape our hilly property to best control and filter runoff. I’ve learned which plants are invasive and dangerous for our forests and can be a better steward of our property. Everyone across Maryland should be encouraged to learn these practices and put them into action. No property is too small to make an impact, and HOA communities are especially well placed to make a difference. The construction of many of these communities has directly led to many runoff and flooding issues – more

pavement, roofs, and shallow-rooted turf where forests used to be, along with extensive fertilizer and pesticide use, have led to many problems for this state. Planting of invasive decorative plants is damaging our forests as well (a problem I am noticing is particularly severe here in Howard County).

While it seems this bill has broad support, for which I am grateful, I wanted to share our experience and my voice. If people in every HOA community were encouraged to try more environmentally friendly lawn and garden practices, it can have a massive positive impact on our state. Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,

Kelly Utter Itwaru & Family

