

Maryland Area Environmentally-Conscious Gardening Group
% Cassie Sherman Marks, Co-Founder
Baltimore, MD 21207

March 7, 2021

Dear Maryland State Senators,

We write to testify in support of House Bill 322.

Our group represents over three thousand gardeners from in and around Maryland who are gardening differently than our parents did in order to be better stewards for the environment and local ecosystems. Among us are Master Naturalists, Master Gardeners, Master Watershed Stewards, teachers, scientists, Weed Warriors from county-based programs around the state, DNR employees, farmers, landscapers, nursery managers, employees of virtually every major national conservation organization and a smattering of smaller, local ones - alongside folks from every walk of life who decided to do some good through the low-impact, responsible stewardship of private land in their care.

Here are just a few compelling reasons that we think you should pass HB 322 into law:

1. Several of us live in HOA-governed communities. There are a few such communities that are embracing better practices, like the HOA of Miramar Landing in Middle River, which has installed beautiful native plantings that require less watering and maintenance because they were informed by science and planned with care. Most HOAs, however, landscape their neighborhoods in ways that, for instance, increase the Lyme-carrying deer tick population, kill native songbirds (whose population is already plummeting), and cause the kind of stormwater runoff disasters that have brought about tragedies like the floods we have seen in historic Ellicott City these past few years – to say nothing of the pesticide use harming our local waterways and food webs.
2. Individual homeowners are capable of helping to offset such practices through better informed stewardship of their own yards. More and more Marylanders want to do so and have the information, supportive gardening communities, nurseries, and landscapers necessary to help them do so successfully and attractively. We'd be delighted to introduce you to several of them - not just gardeners, but also Maryland businesses who support them and continue to multiply. In short, there are so many gardeners who would love to spend their money to make these Maryland businesses more profitable *and* help the environment at the same time, so getting out of the way and letting them seems like an unambiguous win for the state.
3. Our group has supported some of its HOA-bound members when their neighbors have engaged in trespassing, harassment, destruction of valuable personal property, and protracted battles that escalated to the HOA level even when the gardens in question didn't break any HOA rules. We believe this bill is an

important first step toward not only freeing homeowners to make smarter choices, but toward protecting HOAs from becoming embroiled in lengthy, costly, and specious disputes between their members.

There are more reasons - *so* many more reasons - why this is important, and why we must change how we think of our relationships with our yards and gardens if we are to continue to live in the diverse and robust ecosystems that enable our survival, especially in light of the climate crisis. For anyone interested in learning more, we recommend starting with the engaging and well-researched works of *New York Times* best-selling author Prof. Douglas Tallamy, who shares our love of and proximity to the Chesapeake, starting with *Bringing Nature Home* or *Nature's Best Hope*. Or start with our friends in the Maryland Sierra Club's testimony in support of this very same bill.

For now, though, we are pleased that this bill hasn't seen any opposition to speak of so far and hope that it continues on to be signed into law unhindered - and can be a step toward starting more serious conversations about what Maryland can do to enable its citizens to use their own time, energy, and funds to improve our state's ecological resilience.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

The undersigned members of the Maryland Area Environmentally-Conscious Gardening Group, including:

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