

February 22, 2023

HB-612 Natural Resources – Licensed Tree Experts - Alterations

SPONSOR: Delegate Courtney Watson

POSITION: Favorable

Good afternoon, Chairman Barve, Vice Chairman Stein, and members of the committee. Thank you for allowing me to present House Bill 612.

To Whom it may concern,

Over the past few years, I have seen the number of unlicensed tree companies in the Montgomery and Howard County areas in which we operate increase significantly. This is concerning on many levels as it poses a threat to property owners, the public, those employed by these companies, and the health of the trees in our community. Below I have elaborated on a few specific items in greater depth:

Lack of Insurance: These companies often lack the adequate workers compensation insurance coverage, putting themselves, their employees, and the property owner (consumer) at risk in the event of an accident or injury.

Employee Safety: Unfortunately, almost every time I have encountered one of these companies in the process of a job, the employees tend to lack basic PPE (helmets, eye protection, etc.) and are exposing themselves to unnecessarily hazardous situations, as they lack proper equipment and training needed to complete the job safely.

Consumer Protection: In addition to the risk that the lack of insurance poses to consumers, it is concerning how many of these companies openly violate many aspects of the law in regard to consumer protection. For instance, many do not provide a formal written contract with a specific scope of work for a set dollar amount. Many are sending a simple and extremely vague text messages with no date, company info, scope of work, etc. This often leaves homeowners with an unfinished or partially complete job which they are then forced to hire a qualified contractor to complete.

Threat to Tree Health & Urban Tree Cover: The lack of knowledge and training to properly assess a tree's health in many cases leads to improper pruning techniques (Spiking trees while pruning, topping, etc.) exposing our valued urban trees to pests and disease, which then often results in the tree dying creating safety concerns and additional unnecessary expense for the consumer.

Furthermore, I have seen a few cases in which these individuals have intentionally misled property owners, causing them to think a structurally sound and perfectly healthy tree needs to be removed, once again posing a threat to our urban tree cover (by healthy trees being unnecessarily removed), while imposing financial harm on consumers.

Based on the reasoning above, I respectfully ask that you provide a favorable report on House Bill 612.

Sincerely,

John Miller – Owner/Managing Member Rock Creek Tree, Turf, & Landscape.