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**Committee: Health and Government Operations**

**Testimony on: HB92 – “Prohibition on Use of State Funds – Invasive and Nonnative Plant Species”**

**Position: Support**

**Hearing Date: January 28, 2021**

The Maryland Sierra Club submits this testimony in support of HB92. This legislation would benefit Maryland’s threatened ecosystems by prohibiting the use of state funds “to purchase or plant an invasive or nonnative plant species,” subject to authority to be given to the Board of Public Works to grant a waiver in certain limited circumstances.

The exponential growth of invasive, nonnative plant species in Maryland is a substantial and growing threat to our natural places. The impact of these species is akin to how the exponential growth of COVID-19 is injuring the health of our state’s residents.

The damage caused by invasive species in the United States, and the efforts to control them, are estimated to cost our country over \$138 billion annually. For example, English Ivy and other invasives kill trees faster than forest stewards can control them, and are thus endangering our forests.

The benefits of bringing invasive species under control include:

- a decrease in temperature extremes located in hotspots;
- increased carbon sequestration to mitigate climate change;
- decreased stormwater problems since a diversity of native plants with different root depths allow the ground to hold more water;
- expanded forest canopy; and
- increased biodiversity with more wildflowers such as spring beauty, native shrubs such as blackberry, and trees such as pawpaw.

In particular, the use of native plants benefits pollinators and the plants that support them, which are critical to agriculture, forests, and wildlife.

We support the bill’s provision allowing the Board of Public Works to grant waivers in certain limited circumstances, which provides a degree of flexibility in the implementation of the ban on use of invasive or nonnative plant species. In this regard, the bill includes an important restriction on the granting of waivers by precluding waivers which would involve purchase or planting of “Tier 1” and “Tier 2” invasive plants.

Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest and largest [national] grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 75,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.

In order to promote transparency in carrying out the waiver provision, we believe that the Board should maintain a list available to the public of any waivers, which would include notations as to the reasons why the waivers were granted. In addition, we suggest the Committee confirm with the Board that it understands that, under the bill, the Board will have the authority to condition the grant of a waiver regarding an invasive species on the implementation of measures to prevent spread of that species.

For these reasons, we strongly urge a favorable report on this bill.

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