



January 27, 2020

Gaithersburg City Council
Gaithersburg City Hall
31 South Summit Avenue
Gaithersburg, MD 20877

**Testimony On: Opt-in to Montgomery County Lawn Pesticide Law
Position: Support**

Dear Gaithersburg Mayor Ashman and Gaithersburg City Council,

The Sierra Club Montgomery County group and the Maryland Chapter strongly urge the Gaithersburg City to opt-in to the Montgomery County lawn pesticide law, aka **Healthy Lawns Act**. Having Gaithersburg opting in would move the city towards safe, healthy community for both its residents and wildlife.

Despite legal protections that exist to regulate pesticides, the safeguards are woefully inadequate. The Sierra Club advocates for restrictions on pesticides and supports local government efforts to regulate these toxics more strictly to shift the responsibility of avoiding pesticides off of people and onto pesticide manufacturers. In 2015, we strongly backed the passage of the county's Healthy Lawns Act as it allows the county to provide greater public protections from pesticide exposure and set people's health and our environment as a priority.

Currently, the use of dangerous pesticides on lawns in Gaithersburg is an individual choice, yet the consequences of that choice are imposed upon all other people and our environment. Even when these chemicals are used according to its label, chemical trespass happens. Lawn pesticides do not stay put — they run-off and can drift for miles from their application site. This poses health risks to people, creates involuntary exposure to vulnerable children and pets, pollutes the air in our communities, contaminates water bodies, and poisons the habitat of our region's birds, bees and other wildlife, many of which are in crisis.

Opting in to the Healthy Lawns Act would protect the health of Gaithersburg families and visitors, protect the city's waterways which lead into our county's drinking water, and protect our region's wildlife from harmful pesticide exposure and contamination. There are many safer ways to care for lawns that do not require harmful pesticides. Where the county Healthy Lawns Act is in effect, it restricts the use of these dangerous pesticides on lawns, allowing for safer products and encouraging more sustainable lawn care practices — this fully protects people's health and our environment from unnecessary exposure to harmful pesticides.

In addition, opting in would ensure that Gaithersburg communities are much safer for children, whose developing bodies are most at risk to the harms of pesticide exposure. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has warned that prenatal and early childhood exposure to pesticides, which include landscaping pesticides, are associated with childhood cancers, decreased brain functions, and behavioral problems.¹



Finally, in North America, our populations of once-common species of bees, butterflies, birds and other pollinators are disappearing at alarming rates. Nearly 1 in 4 native bees are at increased risk of extinction.² The native rusty patch bumblebee, once so common throughout Maryland, has now been listed as a federally endangered species.³ The Monarch butterfly population, also once a familiar sight in Maryland, has plummeted by 90% in the past 20 years.⁴ Even once common birds are falling silent as their numbers have decreased by almost 30% in the past 50 years.⁵ The use of harmful lawn pesticides will continue to expose wildlife to a “toxic soup” of chemicals that have lethal and sublethal effects. However, Gaithersburg City has the power to act and be part of the solution. Gaithersburg City opting in to Healthy Lawns Act will transition the local environment from a landscape blanketed with toxic lawn chemicals to a more welcoming, environmentally-friendly city that would preserve and save our beneficial wildlife species.

Gaithersburg families deserve the health and environmental protections that the majority of Montgomery County now enjoys in the Healthy Lawns Act. Thus, the Sierra Club strongly supports Gaithersburg City to join Montgomery County as a leader in this area, we urge a favorable vote for Gaithersburg to opt-in to Healthy Lawns Act.

Sincerely,

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Resource Links:

¹ Pesticide Exposure in Children. American Academy of Pediatrics. Dec 2012.
<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/130/6/e1757>

² Landmark Report: Hundreds of Native Bee Species Sliding Towards Extinction. Center for Biological Diversity. March 2017. https://www.biologicaldiversity.org/news/press_releases/2017/bees-03-01-2017.php

³ Fact Sheet Rusty Patched Bumble Bee (*Bombus affinis*). US Fish & Wildlife Service. May 2019.
<https://www.fws.gov/midwest/endangered/insects/rpbb/factsheetrpbb.html>

⁴ Saving the Monarch Butterfly. Center for biological diversity.
https://www.biologicaldiversity.org/species/invertebrates/monarch_butterfly/

⁵ Birds Are Vanishing From North America - *The New York Times*. Sep 2019.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/19/science/bird-populations-america-canada.html>