

Before the Montgomery County Council
Zoning Text Amendment 25-10 – Native Plant Protection Act
Public Hearing – July 22, 2025

Good afternoon, Councilmembers, and thank you for the opportunity to speak.

Let me begin by saying that I am not opposed to this bill. In fact, I support the general goals of the Native Plant Protection Act. Invasive plant species are doing serious harm to our ecosystems in Montgomery County and throughout Maryland, and I appreciate the Council's efforts to address that.

That said, I'd ask that my testimony reflect one guiding principle I hold: I'm generally not a fan of overregulation for its own sake. And while this bill is well-intentioned, I think we can improve it with a little flexibility.

Specifically, I'd like to suggest that the legislation allow an exemption or permitting process for selling and planting non-native bamboo species when they serve a legitimate purpose — for instance, as a privacy barrier in developed or neglected areas.

Let me give you a concrete example. Residents of the Glenway Condominiums in Glenmont back up to the Glenmont Shopping Center — or more precisely, to its dilapidated and neglected rear alley, which has been the subject of numerous county citations. The existing 6-foot fence, which the shopping center doesn't maintain, does little to block the view. If these residents were allowed to plant bamboo — the kind that doesn't spread invasively or which can be controlled through maintenance — they could create a 20-30 foot living barrier that's safer, more attractive, and far more effective.

There are many such places across the county where bamboo, used responsibly, could significantly improve quality of life for residents — without posing an environmental risk. A permitting process or a simple set of guidelines could ensure that such use is thoughtful, controlled, and not ecologically harmful.

Now, I want to pivot to a directly related but larger and more urgent invasive plants issue: vines. While bamboo gets a lot of attention, vines like English ivy, kudzu and porcelain berry are far more destructive. They are climbing and choking trees, swallowing entire forest edges, and spreading unchecked along almost every major road in the county.

This is not hyperbole. I work in a field that requires me to drive extensively across Montgomery County — about 25 miles a day — and I see the damage everywhere. These vines are overtaking private yards, public parks, roadways, and utility corridors. They're killing our oldest trees and erasing the green buffers that make our county livable.

If we're going to spend taxpayer dollars, time, and staff resources, I'd urge the Council to prioritize this more severe threat. We should be focusing on the invasive species doing the most harm, not just the ones easiest to legislate.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak.