

Dear Chair Rausch and Chair Cahill:

We are writing to ask that the Joint Committee on the Environment and Natural Resources give a favorable report to **An Act Establishing the Municipal Reforestation Program (S.452/H.869)**.

Garden Club Federation of Massachusetts represents 170 local garden clubs across the state with a combined total membership of more than 10,000. An important mission of GCFM is to “protect and conserve natural resources” and we are dedicated to educating our clubs about environmental issues.

The Municipal Reforestation Program sets up a structure to provide funding and technical assistance for municipalities to create robust tree canopy cover within their borders, especially in treeless neighborhoods. Passage of this bill would provide numerous benefits related to health, climate change, environmental justice, and biodiversity.

- Increasing the tree canopy helps us mitigate and adapt to climate change by absorbing/sequestering carbon; cooling ambient temperatures; helping with flooding; and reducing air pollution.
- The bill addresses environmental justice by prioritizing planting trees in neighborhoods that have low tree canopy, heat islands and high levels of air pollution and resultant health impacts.
- The bill addresses the critical issue of biodiversity loss by prioritizing the use of native trees, which is an essential part of reversing the rapid decline in insect, bird and other species. Governor Healey’s recently issued executive order outlined the urgent need to preserve biodiversity and protect ecosystems. The planting of native trees provides an opportunity to mitigate both the climate crisis and the biodiversity crisis. The Municipal Reforestation Bill addresses both issues.

We request that the Committee consider making the following amendments to the bill:

- 1) to include funding to grow native trees from seed. This would create a locally grown supply of trees to fill the needs of the Municipal Reforestation bill, which would:
  - provide trees with genetic variation for increased resilience in the face of climate change;
  - create jobs in tree nurseries around the state;
  - reduce transportation costs to towns and cities; and
  - supply the native trees that are needed to help reverse the biodiversity crisis.

While we recognize that there may be some situations in municipal environments where a non-native tree might be an appropriate choice, using native trees wherever they fit the site conditions will provide climate resilience and critical biodiversity support, and should be the choice wherever possible.

- 2) In Chapter 21A Section 28 (a) of the Bill relative to the composition of the Advisory Council to include the following in the list of possible representatives: local garden clubs, and Massachusetts state-wide horticultural and gardening non-profit organizations such as the Garden Club Federation of Massachusetts. Garden clubs and MA gardening non-profit organizations have a wealth of knowledge about trees, native trees, and local conditions affecting the choice, planting and care of trees.
- 3) To change the name of the Urban Forestry Advisory Council to “Municipal Forestry Advisory Council” for a more inclusive title. Other sections of the Bill clearly spell out the priorities for action, but many towns may not relate to the “Urban” moniker while still encompassing areas that qualify as priorities.

The Municipal Reforestation Bill answers urgent environmental, economic, and social needs in the Commonwealth. Trees are needed to help us meet our 2050 net zero greenhouse emissions reduction mandates, and the sooner we plant trees, the sooner they will assist in lowering our carbon emissions and providing numerous other benefits. Taking action now will save us from costly future impacts to our health, our infrastructure, and the health of the ecosystems we depend on for our well-being and survival. This is a very timely opportunity!

We deeply appreciate your taking action to move this bill out of committee. Current and future generations will reap substantial, ongoing benefits.

Sincerely yours,

Marjorie Ann Dienhart

President

Garden Club Federation of Massachusetts, Inc