

TO: Chair Bennett and Members of the House Environment and Natural Resources Committee

CC: Representative Jason Knight & Representative Jennifer Boylan

FROM: Cindy Larson Moura

RE: Support for H7071

DATE: January 21, 2026

Dear Chairman Bennett and honorable members of the House Environment and Natural Resources Committee:

Thank you for your service and your commitment to protecting the environment for future generations. My name is Cindy Larson Moura, I am a resident of Barrington, a board member of the Barrington Land Conservation Trust, and co-owner of Prickly Ed's Cactus Patch Native Plant Emporium - a Rhode Island Small Business.

I am writing to urge you to support H7071 (Boylan), which would prohibit the importation, transportation, disbursement, distribution, sale, or purchase of any species of non-native (exotic) invasive plants as defined by the Director of RI DEM. Passage of this bill is long overdue, should receive your urgent and serious attention, and should be passed without delay out of committee to the House floor with a recommendation for passage.

Rhode Island is the only state in the Northeast, and among the few remaining states nationwide, without restrictions on the sale of invasive plant species. Invasive plants pose significant risks to natural ecosystems, agricultural productivity, and the broader economy. They are non-native species that spread rapidly and aggressively in new environments, often outcompeting indigenous flora. These species disrupt ecosystem balance, contribute to reduced biodiversity, and may adversely affect agriculture, water resources, and recreational spaces.

The USDA Forestry Services identifies invasive plants as one of the four greatest threats to national forests and grasslands. Additionally, Rhode Island's Wildlife Action Plan recognizes invasive plants as a principal threat to key local habitats. We should not continue to permit a segment of individuals and businesses to continue profiting from the sale of invasive plants to the detriment of all taxpayers and the state's natural resources. Leadership and decisive action on this matter are essential to safeguard Rhode Island's environment and public welfare.

The bill does not penalize residents or property owners with existing invasive plants; it only bans new sales of certain invasive species at plant retailers statewide. Most invasive plants entered through intentional sale and planting, and preventing their introduction is a proven, cost-effective management strategy. Further, prohibited plant lists have been shown to be very effective public education tools, helping raise awareness of the importance of plant choices to our shared ecosystems.

As someone who owns a local nursery business, I know that customers often consult industry experts for advice - and most gardeners aim to protect the environment rather than damage it. I have heard from so many Rhode Island consumers who unwittingly were sold invasive plants that they are now paying to replace or managing in their landscapes. I have also heard from new residents to the area who were shocked to see how many invasive plants are still sold and planted here. Shoppers in Rhode Island shouldn't be placed in the position of unknowingly purchasing plants that have been shown to cause harm to our shared environment and then be left with the challenge of managing or removing them later. This issue is not only about protecting the environment, but also a matter of consumer protection.

Habitat destruction continues to be the leading cause of biodiversity loss in Southern New England, as the committee is no doubt aware. As natural spaces shrink, private yards and gardens have become vital corridors for pollinators, songbirds, and other wildlife, allowing them to rest, refuel and move between larger conservation areas. This practice—called corridor gardening—is gaining recognition as one of the fastest-growing trends in the landscaping industry. Corridor gardening promotes the use of native and ecologically valuable plants, while also encouraging the removal of invasive species. To truly support Rhode Island's nursery and landscape industry, it is essential to adopt progressive

regulations and practices instead of allowing us to remain mired in the status quo. Banning a few plant species does not have to harm local businesses; rather, it can encourage the industry to explore the many beneficial native plants that thrive in landscapes better serving consumers while protecting our State's environment.

RI DEM Division of Forestry and Agriculture already oversees, inspects, and regulates places where plants are sold. Introducing routine checks for invasive species should therefore be a straightforward process. Our state could benefit by looking at and adapting practices from Connecticut and Massachusetts, which have enforced restricted plant lists for over twenty years. Plants aren't limited by political borders—they move within ecosystems that we share with nearby states. For this reason, the strategies and regulations used successfully in those states are very relevant to us here in Rhode Island. I would like to propose that language be added to this bill which specifies a date certain by which the Director will have promulgated rules and regulations pertaining to this prohibition and its enforcement, including a date by which they will have reported back to the House committee.

Our interconnected regional environment highlights another important issue: collaborating with neighboring states to prevent invasive plants from spreading is essential to being a responsible regional partner. By working together, we can protect New England's biodiversity rather than accidentally harming one another's efforts. This cooperation is crucial for ecosystem health, climate resilience, and economic stability, all of which ensure vital services like clean water, air purification, and pollination. Healthy, diverse ecosystems not only support essential regional industries like tourism and fishing but also strengthen our natural defenses against climate change and natural disasters.

This bill is frankly only one step in of steps we should be taking to protect, steward, sustain, and improve the fragile ecosystems of the Ocean State. We have to do better. But passage of this bill is a readily attainable step, and a step that has been proven to work. Let's get this first step done without further delay.

Respectfully,

Cindy Larson Moura, Barrington, RI