

Written Testimony in Support of 2026 -- H 7071

Rhode Island Invasive Plant Management Act of 2026

Statement by Lawrence Bacher, Barrington, RI in a personal capacity

Research in *Science* magazine (Vol 366, Issue 6461 pp. 120-124) documents that North American bird populations have declined by 3 billion birds - 30% of the base population - since 1970 when I was in high school. This astounding loss has several causes, but the most significant cause is loss of habitat. As we clear forests and meadows for house lots and agricultural fields, we eliminate habitat that these creatures —and other mammals, reptiles and insects — evolved to inhabit and use for food source.

The Legislature has limited ability address the sociological trends. The Legislature can, however help to mitigate these trends by passing H 7071. Habitat is lost because when we build homes, we clear native habitat to install grass lawns and exotic landscape plants. Many of the plants used for landscape are non-native, which means that native birds and animals have not evolved to find food sources there. H 7071 does not restrict the sale of all non-native plants — only those which are *invasive*. Invasive non-native plants have been imported by the nursery trade without the natural antagonists that co-evolved in their native home. Free of adversaries, they out-compete our Rhode Island native plants, filling in prime growth regions exacerbating the loss of food sources caused by habitat loss. Some of these plants identified by the *Rhode Island Invasive Species Council* include:

- Burning bush
- Japanese barberry
- Russian olive
- Privet
- Norway maple
- Tree of heaven
- Purple loosestrife
- Bamboo
- English Ivy
- Oriental bittersweet
- Yellow iris
- Water chestnut

Invasive plants not only diminish food sources for wildlife — they cause economic harm. Invasive plants invade agricultural fields, reducing crop yields for our farmers, increasing their cost to raise crops by requiring either herbicides or physical removal efforts to enable crops to thrive.

There is an economic downside to this bill. Currently, some Rhode Island nurseries benefit from selling invasive landscape plants to persons from neighboring Connecticut and Massachusetts, where these sales are banned. Rhode Island is the only New England state that does not restrict the sale of harmful invasive species. In this respect, we are poor neighbors. And a source of ecological and agricultural harm that exceeds our borders.

I urge the members of the RI Legislature to join their ten colleagues who sponsor this bill in a considered and vigorous approval.