

State Highway Vegetative Management Modernization and Pollinator Coordination Act

Bill Synopsis

The **State Highway Vegetative Management Modernization and Pollinator Coordination Act** creates a measured and fiscally responsible pathway for Maryland to better support pollinators, improve public access to educational resources, and modernize certain highway land management practices through existing State operations.

The bill allows the State Highway Administration to designate appropriate portions of State highway rights-of-way, including medians and roadside areas, as pollinator corridors. These areas would be managed with low-maintenance native vegetation that supports native pollinator species. A pollinator corridor is defined as a designated portion of State highway land managed to support pollinators. Low-maintenance native vegetation is defined as perennial plant species requiring maintenance equal to or less frequent than standard turf grass mowing cycles.

Safety and Fiscal Safeguards

The bill is written with clear limits and safeguards. No designation may impair roadway visibility, safety standards, drainage, or access requirements. The bill also requires compliance with all applicable federal highway safety regulations.

Just as importantly, these changes may occur only during scheduled maintenance, reseeding, or rehabilitation cycles. That structure allows the policy to work within the State's existing operational framework rather than creating a separate or costly new program.

From a fiscal and administrative standpoint, the bill is intentionally disciplined. It requires implementation within existing appropriations and makes clear that nothing in the Act requires the creation of new positions, the execution of new contracts, or capital expenditures beyond routine maintenance activities. The legislation also does not mandate any minimum acreage conversion. That matters because it preserves flexibility, protects public resources, and allows the State to act where the approach is appropriate, safe, and cost-conscious.

Public Education and Coordination

The legislation also strengthens public education through the Maryland Department of Agriculture. It requires the Department to consolidate existing pollinator and beekeeping educational materials into one publicly accessible digital location on its website.

Those materials must include beginner beekeeping guidance, regionally appropriate native planting recommendations, best practices regarding pesticide awareness, and links to existing State and federal assistance programs.

This portion of the bill improves public access to useful information without creating a new regulatory regime. It helps residents, landowners, small farmers, beekeepers, gardeners, and community organizations better understand how they can support pollinators in ways that are responsible and locally appropriate.

Protection Against Overreach

The bill is carefully constructed to avoid unintended expansion of government authority. It states that the designation of vegetation under the Act does not create additional State liability so long as standard roadway maintenance protocols are followed.

It also states that the Department of Agriculture's educational resource coordination role may not be construed to authorize new regulatory authority, require additional appropriations, or preempt municipal land use authority.

In other words, the bill supports stronger coordination, better public information, and more responsible land management without overreaching beyond its intended purpose.

Accountability and Transparency

The bill requires the State Highway Administration to include key information in its existing annual report, including the acreage designated as pollinator corridors, comparative maintenance frequency, and any observed operational or fiscal impacts.

That reporting requirement provides transparency while still relying on existing reporting mechanisms instead of creating new bureaucratic layers. It gives the public a way to evaluate whether the policy is producing measurable benefits, including reduced maintenance demands, improved land stewardship, and better alignment between infrastructure management and environmental responsibility.

Why This Bill Matters

This legislation reflects a serious and disciplined approach to public policy. It does not impose a sweeping mandate. It does not create an expensive new program. It does not force unnecessary expansion of government.

Instead, it creates a responsible framework for Maryland to better align infrastructure maintenance, environmental stewardship, public education, and long-term cost awareness. The result is a bill designed to do meaningful good through efficient government. It supports pollinators, respects roadway safety, protects taxpayers, strengthens public access to educational resources, and advances environmental stewardship in a way that is careful, measurable, and fiscally responsible.