

May 16, 2025

The Honorable Bill Ferguson  
President of the Senate of Maryland  
H-107 State House  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear President Ferguson,

In accordance with Article II, Section 17 of the Maryland Constitution, I hereby veto SB 980 – *Natural Resources – Maryland Heritage Areas Authority – Funding and Grants*.

I applaud Senators Corderman and Jackson for their bipartisan leadership in supporting the preservation and promotion of Maryland's cultural and historical heritage. The Maryland Heritage Areas program plays a key role in celebrating our state's diverse history.

Currently, the majority of the state's land preservation and recreation programs are funded through Program Open Space (POS) state-share funds. Under existing law, the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority (MHAA) can receive up to \$6 million from POS, and this legislation will double the maximum amount from \$6 million to \$12 million.

While I fully support the intent of the bill to elevate the work of MHAA, I must express concern that this increase significantly affects the long-term sustainability of POS and the many other programs it supports, including the Rural Legacy Program, Baltimore City Direct Grant, Greenspace Equity Program, capital development projects, and critical maintenance across Department of Natural Resources lands.

Program Open Space is foundational to Maryland's efforts to conserve land, expand public access, and invest in outdoor recreation infrastructure. However, this year's budget reflects a difficult fiscal environment, and funding for several core POS supported programs has already been reduced. Expanding the MHAA allocation at this time would further strain limited resources and undermine the state's ability to meet broad conservation and recreation goals.

My administration remains committed to working with the General Assembly to support the important mission of MHAA. However, increasing its share from an already constrained funding pool, especially during a time of fiscal uncertainty, risks jeopardizing other crucial land conservation and resource enhancement investments across the state.

For these reasons, I have vetoed Senate Bill 980.

Sincerely,

Wes Moore  
Governor