

February 19, 2024

Senator Brian J. Feldman, Chair
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
2 West, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

FAVORABLE

SUPPORT FOR ABANDONED OR SUNKEN VESSELS AND WATERWAY IMPROVEMENT FUND GRANTS ACT (SB674)

As the executive director of the Southern Maryland National Heritage Area, I am writing to offer our support for SB674, which in addition to addressing issues concerning the state's Waterway Improvement Fund and abandoned vessels, also establishes a mechanism to fund a Maritime Heritage Grant program.

PROGRAM WILL SUPPORT DIVERSE PROGRAMS THROUGHOUT BAY WATERSHED

The new Maritime Heritage Grant funding will provide sorely needed support for organizations like ours that are working to interpret and engage the public around the diverse history of the Bay. Currently, there are very few flexible sources of funds for programming and this new fund will address that crucial need. From maritime museums to lighthouses to sites of indigenous native cultures, the newly established fund will provide much-needed support to expand public programming and engagement throughout the entire Chesapeake Bay watershed.

SUSTAINABLE FUNDING SOURCE & POSITIVE IMPACT ON HERITAGE TOURISM

The dedicated fund would be administered by a qualified non-profit organization selected by the Department Natural Resources. Funding would then be made available annually through a competitive grant process to organizations and units of government for maritime heritage and history projects. The intent of the legislation is to provide funding to support historic interpretation, programming, events, and research at maritime sites within the watershed. The \$250,000 annual appropriation will come from the DNR Waterway Improvement Fund.

This arrangement, administered by a partner nonprofit organization selected by DNR, is a win-win for Maryland's renowned maritime heritage and history and will help to increase opportunities for visitation to our site and the added benefit these visits have on our local economy.

It is for these reasons and the positive impact it will have across the state on organizations of all sizes that we offer our full support. **We urge a favorable report.**

Respectfully,

Lucille W. Walker
Executive Director
Southern Maryland National Heritage Area