



Testimony to the House Environment and Transportation Committee

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Organization: Lower Susquehanna Heritage Greenway

Issue: SUPPORT SB0980
Natural Resources - Maryland Heritage Areas Authority - Funding and Grants

Date: March 24, 2025

The Lower Susquehanna Heritage Greenway (LSHG), representing Cecil and Harford Counties, is in FULL SUPPORT of the legislative initiative SB0980 which will allow for lifting the cap on Maryland Heritage Areas' funding. The proposed legislation would allow the Maryland Heritage Areas program to receive up to \$12 million annually (from Transfer Tax revenues – NOT the General Fund), lifting the current cap of \$6 million.

SB0980 does not carry a spending mandate but it would allow for Maryland Heritage Areas Authority (MHAA) appropriations of **up to** \$12 million. Passing the law now means that when it makes fiscal sense for the state to take more advantage of the power of Maryland Heritage Areas to generate more tourism spending, create and sustain more jobs, and increase local and state tax base, we will be poised and ready.

This is forward thinking at a time when it is most needed.

Heritage Areas have proven to be an impactful community economic driver! They work closely with communities across the state, offering vital services such as grant application assistance, technical expertise, project advocacy, and regional coordination. The success of the program—and the overwhelming need for it—is best reflected in the sheer level of applicant interest.

In FY24, MHAA awarded \$5 million in grants to support 100 projects, leveraging an impressive \$21.4 million in non-state matching funds. This resulted in an additional \$16.4 million in leveraged funding—representing a **328% increase** beyond the original state allocation.

And this is just the raw data from our project partners. It doesn't even factor in additional state investments or the economic ripple effects of these projects.



Heritage Areas not only foster community engagement but are also as a powerful economic driver. For every \$1 Maryland invests, the return is \$7. That translates to \$2.4 billion injected into Maryland's economy each year and the support of 40,000 jobs statewide.

For FY26, 236 Intent to Apply forms were submitted. This underscores the urgent need for future investment.

There is a \$8 million gap in funding ability each year, stalling high-impact projects. Grant levels have not been raised in 30 years, and this future funding will allow the grant levels to rise to where they can be the most impactful in our counties, towns, and communities. In these difficult economic times, the Maryland Heritage Areas program is one of the solutions.

The Maryland Heritage Areas cover a portion of every county in the state, and the City of Baltimore. This program is the primary tool used to encourage heritage tourism to Maryland, where heritage/cultural visitors stay longer and spend more money in our communities.

For this reason, we respectfully request your support of SB0980. These grants are not just expenditures—they are strategic investments that drive economic growth, generate tax revenue, and create jobs for Marylanders.

The LSHG is a non-profit certified Maryland Heritage Area located in Harford and Cecil Counties along the Lower Susquehanna River and Upper Bay, the LSHG's mission is to encourage regional economic development through heritage tourism primarily by supporting public recreation efforts, particularly trail development and public water access, historic preservation, cultural interpretation, and conservation efforts.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Brigitte C. Carty
Executive Director