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TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

Name: Lucille W. Walker, Executive Director

Organization: Southern Maryland National Heritage Area

Issue: **SUPPORT SB0980**

Natural Resources - Maryland Heritage Areas Authority - Funding and Grants

Date: March 26, 2025

The Southern Maryland National Heritage Area is in FULL SUPPORT of the legislative initiative SB0980 which will allow for lifting the cap on Maryland Heritage Area funding. The proposed legislation would allow the Maryland Heritage Areas program to receive up to \$12 million annually, lifting the current cap of \$6 million. The legislation does not guarantee funding, of course, but allows for this important program to receive a greater share of Program Open Space funding from the state's transfer tax, if and when it should become available.

These are difficult times for our state, and the Maryland Heritage Area program is part of the solution.

With community driven projects and initiatives that grow our local economies, this program has a proven record of return on investment that is stunning: \$7 return for every \$1 of state funding! Also, thousands of jobs are supported, and millions in state and local tax revenue is generated.

The Southern Maryland National Heritage Area is both a state and national heritage area, covering Calvert, Charles, St. Mary's, and southern Prince George's counties. Maryland is only one of two states in the entire nation with a state-based heritage area program. Maryland has recognized the profound economic and cultural value of heritage areas, both to bringing visitors/tourists to the state and to enhancing our communities for residents. This shows how much Maryland values its heritage!

Right now, there is an \$8 million funding gap 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. The Maryland Heritage Areas cover a portion of every county in the state, and the City of Baltimore.

This legislation queues up Maryland for future growth! Please support SB0980. Please invest in Maryland's heritage. Please invest in Maryland's future.

Respectfully submitted,

Lucille W. Walker