

Name: Elizabeth Scott Shatto, Executive Director



Organization: Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area

Issue: SB0980

Position: Favorable

Date: House Environment and Transportation Committee, March 24, 2025

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of SB0980. **SB0980 was supported unanimously in the Senate and I hope the House will follow suit.** The time is right to establish the possibility of a greater share of Program Open Space funds to support the important investment made by the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority in our revenue-producing place-based assets.

Together, Maryland's 13 heritage areas bring about economic benefit to the tune of: \$2.4 billion in economic contribution, 40,000 jobs supported and sustained, \$320 million in local and state tax revenues generated annually.

Potentially, SB980 will double those impact numbers. MHAA grants support heritage tourism focused projects, but current law caps the budget at \$6 million, \$5.1 of which goes to our partners for grants. Each year, well-scoring, worthy projects go unfunded. On average there's an \$8 million funding gap and sometimes it is much more.

In our heritage area, 34 projects were identified in Intent to Apply submissions for FY26, including the following that promise great ROI:

- \$100,000 request from the Catoctin Furnace Historical Society to extend the African American Cemetery Interpretive Trail and to develop a Cemetery Preservation Plan which will be invaluable to DNR for site management.
- \$54,750 request from the Claggett Center in Buckeystown for rehabilitation of the Buckingham Industrial School Building.
- \$50,000 request from the City of Brunswick to support a visitor experience plan linking several projects in progress that will extend the City's heritage tourism appeal to visitors coming into the city via the C&O Canal and Potomac River.
- \$100,000 request from AARCH (African American Culture and Heritage Society) - for the final work necessary to prepare the new Heritage Center for opening - serving our residents and a growing African American travel market.
- \$100,000 request from the National Museum of Civil War Medicine, for an updated exhibition experience including more inclusive interpretation throughout - a major overhaul of a visitor experience that promises huge heritage tourism impact.
- \$100,000 request for the final phase of American Hall restoration (African American resource, strong Civil War connections, will include a visitor experience to boost heritage tourism).

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SB980 does not carry a spending mandate but it would allow for future 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 bases, we will be poised and ready. This is forward thinking at a time when it is most needed.

HEART OF THE CIVIL WAR

For the sake of all Marylanders, we hope SB0980 will succeed.

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