



Maryland Department of Agriculture

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Maryland Department of Agriculture

Legislative Comment

Date: January 29th, 2026

BILL NUMBER: SB 226
BILL TITLE: Maryland Heritage Area Authority and Heritage Areas - Alterations
MDA POSITION: SUPPORT

The Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) respectfully submits this letter in support of *Senate Bill 226 - Maryland Heritage Area Authority and Heritage Areas - Alterations*, a Maryland Department of Planning departmental bill that makes various administrative changes to the Maryland Heritage Area Authority (MHAA). These changes include a repeal of the 50% project grant award cap, granting MHAA the ability to set matching percentages for grants as they deem appropriate, and removing antiquated requirements surrounding state officials developing “program statements” to support Certified Heritage Areas (CHAs), instead requiring the same officials to directly support and assist these areas, and the Authority being required to send certain boundary maps to local county clerks. Of importance to the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA), the bill also adds the Maryland Secretary of Agriculture to the voting board of the Authority.

In 2010 the Maryland Secretary of Agriculture, along with the Superintendent of the State Department of Education, were invited to join the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority as non-voting members. This was done so Authority members could be informed of agricultural priorities and participate in inter-agency collaboration when making their decisions. Including MDA on the Authority is particularly important as MHAA governs the Maryland Heritage Areas Program (Program) which awards grants to heritage-related organizations throughout the state that facilitate place-based experiences in support of promoting Maryland’s historic, cultural, and natural assets. These grants in turn boost local economic activity. Given the program’s reach – spanning from Western Maryland to the lower Eastern Shore – and its positive impact on local communities and their economies, MDA views the Authority’s board as a beneficial entity to serve on and welcomes the opportunity for the department’s Secretary to be added as a voting member. With this change Maryland’s agricultural priorities will have a direct say in the

decisions of the Authority which will help ensure positive economic impacts made through the Program flow through to local natural assets.

For these reasons, MDA strongly supports SB 226 and respectfully requests a favorable report. MDA appreciates the consideration of the above information in the Committee's deliberations.

If you have additional questions, please contact Harrison Palmer, MDA Chief of Staff at Harrisonb.palmer@maryland.gov or (410) 980-9887.