

SB 226 - MHAA Alterations - MDP FAV Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Andrew Wilson

Position: FAV

HEARING DATE: January 29th, 2026

BILL NO: SB 226

COMMITTEE: Finance

POSITION: Support

FOR INFORMATION CONTACT: Andrew Wilson (443) 721-6789

TITLE: Maryland Heritage Area Authority and Heritage Areas - Alterations

BILL ANALYSIS:

SB 226 seeks to amend Title 13, Subtitle 11 of the Financial Institutions Article to establish a series of administrative updates to the Maryland Heritage Area Authority (Authority), staffed by the Maryland Historical Trust (MHT) and chaired by Maryland Department of Planning (MDP) Secretary Rebecca L. Flora. These updates include adding voting members to the board, increasing the number of members needed for quorum, removing project funding caps for grant awards, allowing the Authority to determine an appropriate funding level when issuing grants, repealing an antiquated requirement of the Authority to send boundary maps to county clerk offices, and removing an outdated requirement of both the Authority and state agencies surrounding the preparation of program statements. This requirement has been replaced with an affirmation that agencies who have program responsibilities within the Authority must support and assist certain activities in certified heritage areas (CHA). For context, the Authority is the governing body of the Maryland Heritage Areas Program (Program). The Program designates, supports, and collaborates with CHAs and their partners to create place-based experiences for the public that preserve and promote Maryland's unique stories and contribute to the well-being of local economies.

POSITION AND RATIONALE:

Following a strategic planning process that resulted in "[Maryland Heritage Areas Program Strategic Plan, A Statewide Vision for Success \(July 2025 - June 2032\)](#)" (Plan), MDP proposes administrative updates to the Authority's statute, Financial Institutions Title 13 Subtitle 11, to help fulfill Priority #3 on page 14 of the Plan. This priority charges the Authority to "assess and refine Authority governance and the operational effectiveness of the Program" and one of the

strategies to help realize this priority is to “update foundational documents to support the strategic plan.” An assessment of the Authority’s statute has been completed and MDP is pursuing four updates to align the statute with the aforementioned Plan.

The first amendment proposes removing the requirement that grants awarded by the Authority cannot exceed 50% of a project’s costs and gives the Authority the discretion to set these caps as they deem appropriate. These caps indirectly set matching requirements for prospective grantees, and given changing financial times this amendment allows the Authority to take inflation and other market trends into consideration and adjust to the needs of grantees.

The bill also proposes the addition of the Secretary of Agriculture, the Superintendent of the State Department of Education, and a member of the public with significant education or experience in natural resource stewardship or climate resiliency to the voting board of the Authority. The Secretary of Agriculture and the Superintendent of the State Department of Education have been non-voting members since 2010 when they were invited by the Authority to join, and the member of the public replaces a representative from the defunct Maryland Greenways Commission. The addition of these members to the voting board will allow the Authority to make decisions that directly reflect the interests of stakeholders in the development, maintenance, and support of CHAs. With the addition of two new members, the bill also proposes increasing the number of members needed to achieve quorum from nine to ten.

Finally, SB 226 looks to amend two requirements of the Authority and its members. The first amendment removes a requirement for State officials on the voting board of the Authority to develop “program statements” to support CHAs. This requirement is ambiguous and does not reflect the ways these officials can and do support CHAs. Instead, this language is replaced with a requirement to directly support and assist activities in CHAs in the areas of planning, implementation, use, development, and regulation. Then, the bill looks to repeal the requirement for the Authority to send a copy of each boundary map to the office of the county clerk where the CHA is located. Sending these copies is an outdated means of providing information and is more effectively delivered by Maryland’s map based cultural resource geographic information system, known as Medusa.

These changes will allow the Authority to better serve the needs of CHAs and prospective grantees and assist the purpose of the Program of supporting the economic well-being of our state’s communities by preserving and celebrating the state’s history, cultural traditions, and natural resources.

MDP Position

The Maryland Department of Planning respectfully requests a **favorable** report on SB 226.

Written Testimony SB0226 LOS HCWHA.pdf

Uploaded by: Elizabeth Shatto

Position: FAV

Name: Elizabeth Scott Shatto, Executive Director



Organization: Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area

Issue: SB0226

Position: Favorable

Date: January 27, 2026, Finance Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of SB0226. The Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area is in favor of this administrative bill. It drops reference to matching funds for Maryland Heritage Area Program grants. We understand that match requirements may be established but won't be directed by statute.

This year, the General Assembly will have additional opportunity to support the Maryland Heritage Areas Program. Together, Maryland's 13 heritage areas bring about economic benefit to the tune: \$2.4 billion in economic contribution, 40,000 jobs supported and sustained, \$320 million in local and state tax revenues generated annually.

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Sykesville
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Union Bridge
Westminster

Every action that supports the Maryland Heritage Areas program supports economic growth for Maryland.

Thank you for your consideration of SB0226.

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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.