



**LETTER OF SUPPORT ON BEHALF OF
MARYLAND TOURISM COALITION**

IN SUPPORT OF SB0618 – State Lakes Protection and Restoration Fund

Before the Budget and Taxation Committee, February 24, 2021

Dear Chairman & Committee Members,

My name is Ruth Toomey, Executive Director of Maryland Tourism Coalition, a 50-year-old organization that represents the various services, attractions, organizations and accommodations that make up the State's Industry. MTC is the voice of our state's diverse tour and travel community, bringing together the entire industry to enhance business growth and to promote Maryland as a first-class destination for visitors. On behalf of our 1,000+ members, I would like to express our support of SB0618.

Tourism is vital to Maryland's economy! In a typical year, tourism supports 226,000 direct and indirect jobs, making it the 11th largest industry in the state. Visitors to Maryland spend nearly \$18.6 billion in Maryland each year and those same visitors generate close to \$2.6 billion in state and local taxes. Without tourism in the state of Maryland, each household would pay \$1,175 more in local taxes.

But as we all know, this past year has been anything but typical. While many in our industry were negatively affected by the pandemic – our outdoor tourism destinations, State Parks in particular, saw a massive increase in visitors in 2020 compared to 2019. According to the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, state parks saw 21.5 million visitors compared to 14.9 million the year before. According to DNR, these records were broken despite having temporary closures of campgrounds, cabins and beaches. Having state parks as an attraction can help grow overnight stays, restaurant visits, and shopping trips. But, in order to accommodate the growing demand, we must take care of these wonderful resources and invest in protecting their natural beauty. These lakes should continue to be a priority to continue to encourage increased tourism to Maryland as we get through these trying times.

On behalf of the Maryland Tourism Coalition, we respectfully request that you support SB0618.

Sincerely,

Ruth Toomey

Ruth Toomey
MTC Executive Director