

Oral Testimony in support of SB0730 – Explore Maryland Tax Credit

Good afternoon senators. Good afternoon Mr. chair. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of SB 0730 the Explore Maryland Tax Credit. My name is Chris Riehl. I am the board chair of the Maryland Tourism Coalition and a Baltimore business owner.

I'm honored to represent an industry that supports over 200,000 Maryland jobs and in a typical year generates well over a billion dollars of economic activity. 95% of tourism businesses are small businesses and many of those are women and minority owned.

My company, Rent-A-Tour specializes in creating custom experiences for guests from all over the world. That's really what all of us who work in tourism and hospitality do. We're in the business of making memories, memories that are cherished and treasured forever. And one thing we've all learned this year is that these memories, these shared experiences, are extraordinarily valuable and when we're unable to travel and socialize and be together with one another, it leaves an awful hole.

The challenges this pandemic has created have been painfully difficult for all of us, but especially for our industry. We want to acknowledge and thank the legislature for all you've done so far to support our small businesses and our workers, but we're still hurting. The best way for our industry to recover is for us to get the virus under control and for our customers to return.

After so many months of being unable to travel and make lasting memories with the people we love, we know the demand for new experiences will be high as soon as it's safe to get back out there. This bill would incentivize Marylanders to make those lasting memories right here. Take a drive across the Bay Bridge and spend a few nights on the shore. Go camping in the mountains of Western Maryland. Head into Baltimore and soak up history and culture at museums like the Great Blacks in Wax. This is where memories are made. These experiences stay with us for the rest of our lives. We may not remember names but we surely remember the faces of the servers that sang Happy Birthday to us at our favorite restaurant, the museum docents who made history come to life in vivid detail, the zookeeper who showed us how to feed a giraffe, the worker who served us our funnel cake on the boardwalk.

This bill is a win-win-win. It's a win for Maryland's tourism businesses whose recoveries will be accelerated by the increased visitation this bill will encourage, saving countless jobs in the process. It's a shot in the arm for Maryland's overall economy as this bill will create economic stimulus and boost spending in our state, and it's a win for Marylanders who will most assuredly benefit from discovering all that this great state has to offer.

Those of us that work in this industry believe we have an especially important responsibility. We take it very seriously. It's our job to tell stories and make memories. With your help, soon we'll be back to doing what we do best. I urge you to support the Explore Maryland Tax Credit.

Respectfully Submitted,

Chris Riehl

MTC Board Chair

What have you been dreaming about? What have you been missing?