



FrostburgFirst
41 E. Main St / Frostburg, MD 21532
(301) 689-6900
downtownfrostburg.com

To develop and foster a prosperous, vibrant, sustainable, and resilient designated Frostburg Main Street Community.

January 22, 2021

Senate Finance Committee

Senator Delores G. Kelley
Chair, Senate Finance Committee
Miller Senate Office Building
3 East Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Senator Kelley:

Thank you for this opportunity to share testimony regarding SB256 - Arts and Entertainment Districts – Artistic Work and Arts and Entertainment Enterprise – Definitions. My name is Deirdre Robertson, and I am the Executive Director of FrostburgFirst, a Maryland Main Street Community, Inc., a 501(c)3 non-profit, non-stock corporation which manages the Frostburg Arts & Entertainment District. Frostburg has been a designated Maryland A&E District since 2009 and was re-designated in 2019. FrostburgFirst is also a nationally and state designated Main Street Program, and is included in the Passages of the Western Potomac Heritage Area. We are a member-led economic development and revitalization organization formed and operated for the purpose of promoting and advancing downtown Frostburg, a college town in Western Maryland. Our city is home to approximately 9,000 people, with an increase of around 5,500 when Frostburg State University is in session. Specifically, FrostburgFirst engages the community, enhances streetscape aesthetics, supports and promotes small businesses, and organizes programs and events to make Frostburg a wonderful place to live, work, and visit, and our Arts & Entertainment designation plays a significant role in our mission.

Since Frostburg's original designation, our organization has leveraged funds from Maryland State Arts Council (MSAC) Technical Assistance Grants and Operating Assistance Grants to more than triple the State's investment in the program. The A&E District has provided Frostburg with the means to drive tourism, encourage creative place-making, and share resources with the art community. In the past several years, funding and resources provided through MSAC and Deputy Director Steven Skerritt-Davis have helped us to install decorative lamppost banners designed by a local artist in a community-wide contest, collaborate in multiple public art projects, coordinate events like our annual Arts Walk, and support programs like Pop-Up Frostburg, which provides local artists with a temporary gallery and retail space in our District. Support from MSAC is key in moving our programs forward and developing new resources to encourage the arts to flourish in Allegany County.

I am writing in support of the changes to the definition of "artistic work" and clarification of eligible entities for tax incentives as expressed in SB256. These updates reflect the diversity of the modern artist community and will help to address the needs of Maryland artists, who now face significant financial challenges and difficulty with exhibition. These recommendations are the result of several years of work and feedback from constituency to refine the terms and clarify eligibility for tax incentives, which can be confusing and exclude artists and art enterprises who contribute to our A&E Districts. The changes proposed will make it easier to communicate the benefits of the Frostburg A&E District and assist in economic revitalization and artist relocation efforts. Any fiscal impacts resulting from the proposed changes will be minimal and in the long-term mitigated by the benefits to Districts and residing artists and art enterprises. The ability to clearly communicate the benefits of expanding a business or relocating to our A&E District will provide long-term improvements in business and artist recruitment. A thriving A&E District promotes residential relocation, collaboration with other organizations, and provides resources to existing artists and art enterprises within the district who may not have been previously eligible or did not understand how to take advantage of the tax incentives.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Deirdre Robertson
Executive Director