



PRESERVATION MARYLAND

March 15, 2022

RE: SB928 - Maryland Humanities Council – Appropriation for the Strengthening Humanities Investment in Nonprofits for Equity (SHINE) Grantmaking Initiative

Chairman Guzzone and Members of the Budget and Taxation Committee:

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Preservation Maryland and our thousands of statewide supporters, I would like to offer our support of SB928 and our belief in the value of investing in humanities organizations statewide. Through their Maryland History Day, Museum on Main Street, and One Maryland One Book programs, Maryland Humanities reaches more than a quarter million people annually, and this legislation would help them further expand their reach by directly supporting local humanities organizations across the state.

SUPPORT FOR THE SHINE GRANTMAKING INITIATIVE

Preservation Maryland enthusiastically supports SB928, which establishes the Strengthening Humanities Investment in Nonprofits for Equity (SHINE) Grantmaking Initiative program and funds it at \$500,000 beginning in FY24. Through their Maryland History Day, Museum on Main Street, and One Maryland One Book programs, Maryland Humanities reaches more than a quarter million people annually. This legislation before you today would help them expand their impact and reach even further by directly supporting local humanities organizations throughout Maryland.

Maryland does not have a central state museum and has instead previously invested in its network of small community-based museums to better tell the full history of the state and its diverse stories. Historic and cultural museums operate in every Maryland county. Unfortunately, for nearly a decade, the primary state museum support program, the Maryland Historical Trust's Museum Assistance Grant, has gone unfunded. Without that program, these museums are struggling, and many are desperately fighting for survival, especially in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. Rural and urban museums alike are suffering from a lack of support, especially operating support.

For the last 50 years, Maryland Humanities has been a key partner with a history of successful grant making within the state's humanities community. In addition to their usual annual programming, over the past 18 months, Maryland Humanities has also awarded \$1.425 million in federal COVID-relief funds to 136 organizations, reaching every county and Baltimore City with much-needed operating support. Beginning this year, they will exclusively award general operating support grants to Maryland nonprofits, making them one of the first nonprofit state humanities councils nationally to do so. The SHINE Grants Initiative would allow them to continue offering this much needed operating support to local organizations who may not

qualify for other state funding from the Maryland State Arts Council, Maryland Historical Trust, or Maryland Heritage Areas Authority.

Maryland Humanities is often one of the only options for these important cultural institutions that preserve and interpret Maryland's vast and varied history. Operating support is essential to the organizations' survival but is often not provided for in other grant programs. Indeed, operating support is one of the primary unmet needs for museums and cultural institutions. With passage of this bill, Maryland Humanities will be able to sustain their expanded general operating grantmaking for more than just one year. SHINE will focus on small and mid-size humanities, arts, cultural, and educational nonprofits that may not have staff capacity or resources to be competitive in fundraising, either from government programs or other private funders. This focus on under-resourced organizations will have a positive impact in many communities across the state, allowing grantees to employ grant funds where the need is greatest for their work and those they serve.

Providing funding to these organizations is not solely altruistic. Tourism supports 143,000 jobs in Maryland – and generates over \$2.3 billion in state and local tax revenue. A major component of Maryland's tourism industry is heritage tourism – visitors looking to experience the state's rich heritage. The funding through SB928 could invest in the resources that cater to these lucrative visitors. Heritage tourists stay longer and spend more than any other category of tourist. Similar state investment in heritage tourism resources, through the Maryland Heritage Areas program, has provided a 4:1 return on the state's investment. With SHINE grants, non-profit history and humanities organizations could invest in their historic resources and move beyond 'starvation level' operations to engage new audiences and raise additional private dollars to support their evolving missions.

We encourage you to support this initiative because it is unique in addressing an unmet need faced by hundreds of nonprofit organizations throughout the state. The program would allow grantees to utilize grant funds where the need is greatest for their work and for those they serve, thereby allowing currently under-resourced organizations to have a positive impact in communities in every corner of the state.

We respectfully request a favorable report on SB928 and thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Elly Colmers Cowan
Director of Government Relations