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Appropriations Committee



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The Maryland House of Delegates

ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in Support of HB 446 Baltimore County – Disposition of Marriage Ceremony Fee Funding the Baltimore County Historical Trust

Testimony of Delegate Cathi Forbes
Hearing March 23, 2022
Judicial Proceedings Committee

What this bill does

This bill increases the amount of funding the Baltimore County Historical Trust receives from the performance of courthouse marriage ceremonies from \$15 to \$25.

History on the issue

The National Historic Trust Preservation Act of 1966 required states to protect historically significant buildings, sites, and towns and invest in historic preservation.

Instead of making this part of government operations, the state of Maryland opted to vest this responsibility in nonprofit organizations. In Baltimore County we have the Baltimore County Historical Trust, which does business as the [Preservation Alliance of Baltimore County](#) (PABC).

But here's the unusual part: The Trust, and other nonprofit preservation groups across the state, receive their funding through a Maryland Family Law statute, [Family Law §2-410](#). It requires a portion of the proceeds from courthouse marriage ceremonies to be directed to these preservation groups. That is the main source of their funding.

Across Maryland, with the exception of Cecil County, it costs \$25 for a Clerk of Court or Judge to perform a marriage ceremony. In Baltimore County, \$10 of each ceremony fee goes to the general fund, and \$15 goes to the Baltimore County Historical Trust. This \$15 rate was made part of the statute fifteen years ago -- in 2006. Prior to 2006, the Baltimore County Historical Trust received just \$5 from each marriage ceremony performed.

Why this bill matters

Preservation Alliance of Baltimore County has struggled to do the [important work](#) they are responsible for with current funding levels. The group employs one part-time staffer, who is a qualified preservationist, and the rest of the work is done through volunteer efforts and grants. Without adequate funding to properly pay the part-time staffer, retention is difficult. And without the staffer, none of the grant proposals can be written.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the group's budget was already approaching a point where the work was unsustainable with the funding provided. With the pandemic, and the closure of the courthouses, no marriages were performed and the funding dropped to zero. When the courthouse reopened, marriage ceremonies were limited, and they have not yet reached even the inadequate pre-pandemic levels of funding.

The 40% increase in funding this bill provides will help the Preservation Alliance in the short-term while fewer ceremonies are being conducted, and when the courthouse marriage ceremony schedule returns to normal, it will provide a sustainable and reasonable level of funding for their important work.

Why you should vote for this bill

The benefits of historic preservation are immense. At the most basic level it preserves the past and fosters an appreciation of our local history. From an environmental standpoint it conserves resources and saves money by repairing and reusing existing buildings instead of tearing them down and building new ones. The Preservation Alliance of Baltimore County is charged with this mission and deserves adequate funding. I'm pleased to say that the additional expense this bill requires from Baltimore County has been approved by the administration.

I ask for a favorable report on HB 446. Thank you.