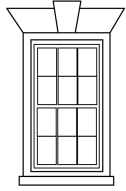


HB 446 - IN SUPPORT



Preservation
Alliance of
Baltimore
County

8013 Bellona Avenue
Towson, MD 21204
www.preservationabc.org

February 10, 2022

The Honorable Delegate Catherine Forbes
Lowe House Office Building, Room 304
6 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Delegate Forbes,

I am honored to write this testimony in support of HB-446 that is scheduled to come before the Baltimore County delegation. I appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony in writing as this week I will be unavailable as I will be on Annual Training with the Maryland National Guard.

This bill as presented will allow the Baltimore County Historical Trust (BCHT), dba The Preservation Alliance of Baltimore County to continue and expand its mission of preserving the county's built heritage and open spaces for future generations. BCHT was founded in 1976 (and fully incorporated in 1981) by county residents who saw that much of the county's unique built heritage and open spaces were being lost. The organization is charged with directly preserving historic buildings and sites in Baltimore County. We also advise and support community groups and private citizens towards the same goal through nomination to federal, state and county historic landmark registers.

I feel it should be noted that BCHT is distinct and separate from the Baltimore County Historical Society. That organization's mission is documentary in nature and ours is focused on the preservation of buildings, sites and historic open spaces. BCHT's goals and missions are realized through the employment of a part time Executive Director. The Executive Director provides education, support to county residents, handles administrative duties and most importantly, administers our county-wide grant program. BCHT's grant program provides tangible, direct assistance to owners of historic properties and sites through monetary grants and consulting from licensed engineers and architects.

For almost 30 years, BCHT has employed a part-time Executive Director as our sole employee. Because of our county's physical size, population density, complexity and diversity, paid staff are a necessity to the success of the mission. BCHT's main income source, marriage license fees, has failed to keep up with rising labor costs and inflation and has lately prevented organizational growth. With the proposed improvement in funding, BCHT will be able to retain our current staff, hire additional staff as needed and grow the organization to meet the challenges and complexity of our changing world. As noted in the law, BCHT maintains total transparency and accountability to the people through our reporting requirements.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused serious harm to BCHT's finances and highlighted the need for improved funding. The closure of the courthouse effectively reduced our income to zero for most of calendar year 2020. When marriage ceremonies resumed, it was at a drastically reduced level. Even as the courthouse reopened to full capacity, revenues have not recovered to previous levels which were already inadequate to support operations and growth. Despite the loss of half of normal income, the Board of Directors elected to fund the grant program in 2021. I believe that our commitment to providing financial and service grants despite financial hardship is direct evidence of our dedication to our mission and to the people of Baltimore County.

With an improved and stable source of income, BCHT can increase grant program funding and put additional resources back out into the community through direct grants and professional services. Recently, our organization created a unique grant program to help older adults to "age in place"¹ by providing architectural and engineering services and monetary grants for repairs to their historic homes. The first recipients of this grant were three homeowners in Historic East Towson, an historically African-American community in Baltimore County that has faced many challenges over the decades. It is our intent to redouble our efforts and grow the organization so that we can expand our grant program and continue to support Baltimore County residents for many years to come.

The stabilized and improved funding that this bill will provide to our organization will have an immediate and direct impact to the citizens of Baltimore County. It will allow BCHT to fully fund the grant program, retain and hire highly qualified staff and continue the important work of the National Historic Preservation Act here in Baltimore County. Baltimore County's heritage is unique, irreplaceable and a physical manifestation of our shared story. It is our hope that together we can preserve today for tomorrow.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, please accept my gratitude for your consideration and your ongoing support.

I look forward to discussing this further at your convenience.

Best regards,



Bryan Y. Fischer
Vice Chairman

¹ <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/aging-place-growing-older-home>