



My name is Chris Riehl. I'm the owner of a guide and receptive service based in Baltimore called Rent-A-Tour and I also represent our industry as a board member of both the Baltimore Tourism Association and the Maryland Tourism Coalition.

Today I'm respectfully asking the committee for a favorable report on HB1273. Thank you to Delegate Kevin Hornberger for introducing this bill and to all of the cosponsors, as well as those sponsoring the cross-filed Senate bill, Republicans and Democrats, from all over Maryland. This measure has statewide, bipartisan support.

While the last two years have been challenging for us all, they've been particularly difficult for the tourism and hospitality industry. We were among the first to feel the economic impact of the pandemic as group tours, events, and conferences began canceling. We've made tremendous progress, due to the tireless efforts of our public servants and healthcare heroes, but despite all that, it's becoming clear that we may be among the last to fully recover.

That's why I'm urging you support this important legislation that will incentivize Marylanders to vacation in Maryland, and help kickstart an industry that has traditionally been one of the most successful and highest-performing sectors of our economy. This is an economic stimulus bill. I'm confident that the revenue generated by increased visitation will give a much-needed boost to small businesses like mine and help restore thousands of lost jobs, while the collection of additional sales & use taxes, amusement, and room taxes, will offset any expected losses resulting from the income tax credit.

But more than that, this legislation will encourage Marylanders to discover just how special our state is. I've personally led tours of Baltimore for groups visiting from all over the world, but some of my favorite groups are those from other parts of Maryland. It's incredibly rewarding to watch as they rediscover our city's extraordinary heritage and culture; and by the time they leave, they're beaming with a renewed sense of pride. The same goes for Baltimoreans visiting Western Maryland or denizens of the D.C. suburbs traveling to the Eastern Shore. By choosing to make memories here, instead of in Pennsylvania, Virginia, or Delaware, they'll be inspired by our powerful stories, amazed by our natural beauty, and delighted by our friendly hospitality. In turn, they'll become some of our most effective ambassadors, encouraging others to come and experience the wonder of Maryland for themselves.

We talk a lot about the power of tourism with regards to the economic activity it produces, the tax revenue it generates, and the jobs it supports, but for me, what's most powerful about tourism are the shared experiences we help build. We know how much those shared experiences mean to us because we know how hard it was when they were taken from us. Those shared experiences with our friends, our families, and our loved ones are the foundation of cherished and treasured memories. So, let's pass this bill and encourage our fellow Marylanders to make more of those memories in Maryland.