



March 2, 2023

The Honorable Kumar Barve Chair
House Environment and Transportation Committee

Re: HB1038

Position: ***Support with Amendments***

Chair Barve and Sub-Committee Members:

On behalf of the Maryland Tourism Coalition (MTC) and our members, I am writing to express our **support with amendments** for the funding for the Tourist Area and Corridor Signage Program (TAC). The TAC sign program while considered a way finding program by the State Highway Administration, it also acts as a marketing tool for the businesses who are approved through the program's application process. The Maryland Tourism Coalition, along with the Maryland Office of Tourism and the State Highway Administration are the ones who are responsible for approving the applications. Currently, three counties have not completed construction (Anne Arundel, Howard and Baltimore) and 3 counties are placed on hold with back logged applications because the program ran out of funding (Somerset, Wicomico & Worcester). I ask that before we use the proposed funding for new signs, we finish the construction of the signs and clear the back log.

Tourism is a very important part of Maryland's economy. In fact, it is the 12th largest private sector employer, creating 173,700 jobs. Tourism generates \$2.1 billion in state and local taxes saving Maryland households nearly \$1,000 annually in state taxes. For every \$1 spent on marketing tourism by the Maryland Office of Tourism, \$31 comes back to the Maryland economy. The TAC sign program helps both domestic and especially international visitors to their destination from the highways.

While the role of the State Highway Administration is to get drivers through the state swiftly & safely, the TAC signs are an important tool to navigating the state, especially in rural areas where cell phone reception may be spotty. And again, the signage helps keep people off their phones while driving. The signs, while not created to be a marketing tool, are just that. When you are driving down 70 and you see a sign for one of these attractions, you may not stop then, but you may on your way back or plan a trip for another time.

The sign program was created over 10 + years ago leaving those who are eligible for signage to a very short list as breweries, distilleries and agritourism and others were not as popular as they are today. Other important sectors are not eligible for this program, live entertainment venues such as the Lyric or Hippodrome, do not qualify. We also look to change the requirements of the days and hours of operations that the business must be open due to the fact that coming out of the pandemic and the loss of the workforce has forced businesses to change their operating models in order to survive.

When we invest in tourism, we all win. We urge you to approve this bill with amendments to fund the TAC Signage Program. Please feel free to reach out to me directly with any questions.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ruth Toomey

**Ruth Toomey, Executive Director
Maryland Tourism Coalition**