

Testimony of Jennifer Ruffner
Greenbelt, MD 20770

February 5, 2024


In Favor Of: S.B. 596 / H.B. 504 – Department of Planning - Maryland Humanities Council - Appropriation to the Marilyn Hatza Memorial Strengthening the Humanities Investment in Nonprofits for Equity (SHINE) Grantmaking Initiative

My name is Jen Ruffner, and I am a resident of Greenbelt, MD. I have spent the majority of my career working for and with nonprofit humanities organizations, including serving as the administrator of the Maryland Heritage Areas Program, which supports many heritage-related humanities organizations across the state. I am writing in enthusiastic support of S.B. 596 / H.B. 504.

The State of Maryland has always generously support nonprofit organizations with project and program support in the fields of the arts, history and the humanities. These funds, from programs such as the Maryland Heritage Areas Program, support discreet projects. They do not, however, support general operating support, something that all nonprofits need more than anything else. As the Chronicle of Philanthropy detailed in their [April 12, 2022 article](#), general operating support is a critical element to ensuring equity in funding, and strengthening nonprofits. The Marilyn Hatza Memorial Strengthening Humanities Investment in Nonprofits for Equity (SHINE) Grant program operated by Maryland Humanities does exactly that for Maryland's humanities nonprofits. All of the funds go to small nonprofits working directly in communities across the state. Including \$1 million in the Maryland General Assembly's budget will allow this program to grow, and indeed, shine, filling a critical need that is currently underfunded.

General operating support (GOS) allows organizations to hire the staff and build the infrastructure they need to more effectively complete the projects that are more frequently funded by government grants and private funders. GOS provides stability and certainty to small organizations, giving them the breathing room they need to plan, expand and grow with an eye to the future, instead of spending all their time and effort raising money to keep the lights on. GOS gives organizations the ability to react to situations as they arise (as evidenced by the pandemic), and to develop and execute a vision for their organization, rather than just piecing together isolated projects without cohesion. GOS is critical to ensure Maryland's small, humanities nonprofits can thrive and grow, and increase equity.

I encourage you to vote favorably for S.B. 596 and H.B. 504 to ensure Maryland humanities nonprofits receive the GOS support they deserve and need.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Ruffner