

February 6, 2024

Maryland General Assembly
Budget & Taxation Committee
3 West, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Senators,

Please accept this letter as written testimony in support of Senate bill 616 for a \$5M appropriation in FY 2025 for the Historical and Cultural Museum Assistance Program (MAP) at the Maryland Historical Trust (MHT). I represent Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum in St. Michaels, Talbot County, which welcomes 80,000 visitors yearly. We are one of over 400 history museums, historical societies, and community archives in our state that serve countless Marylanders and steward irreplaceable connections to our diverse history, such as the story of Black Kent Island waterman Fillmore King and his workboat, *Alverta*, exhibited in CBMM's new Welcome Center that opened this fall with Maryland capital funding support. If recognized, this reactivation of MAP would build urgently needed capacity within Maryland's network of underfunded yet vitally important history museums.

MAP served history museums by providing operating grants, technical assistance, and networking opportunities from 1991 until 2011 – when the funding stopped. In 2016, the Maryland General Assembly required a report by MHT regarding museum and preservation funding. The report's top recommendation was to reinstitute and fund MAP, which is still in statute at MHT despite receiving no funding for 12 years. Without this essential and steady support, history museums of all sizes struggle to maintain baseline operations.

Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum is stronger today because of past MAP grants, including one that supported our first digital collections database – now with more than 80,000 artifacts, historic photographs, documents, and oral histories accessible online. Another past MAP grant enabled the development of our third-grade curriculum program, the Chesapeake's Best Crab Cakes, which supports Maryland learning goals in reading, social studies, and science; last year we welcomed more than 4500 Maryland students, teachers and chaperones. While CBMM has benefited from Maryland's nationally-recognized Heritage Areas program, curriculum development and museum collections cataloging projects tend not to rank well in that vital heritage tourism program. I urge you to support SB 616.

Respectfully,

Pete Lesher
Chief Historian & Ambassador at Large
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