

Written testimony for Maryland Historical Trust – Historical and Cultural Museum Assistance Program-Funding (SB0616)

February 6, 2024

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

To Whom It May Concern,

Please accept this letter as written testimony in support of an \$5M appropriation in FY 2025 for the Historical and Cultural Museum Assistance Program (MAP) at the Maryland Historical Trust (MHT) as presented in Senate Bill 0616. I represent the museums in Prince George's County. 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. 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.

Our larger institutions struggle with frequent staff turnover losing invaluable institutional knowledge to state and federal cultural agencies offering higher salaries and benefits. In the worst-case scenarios, museums have radically reduced their operations or shutdown altogether due to a lack of support and failing infrastructure. During this fraught time with many states restricting access to knowledge through book bans and restrictive history curriculums, Maryland has the opportunity to be a national leader in advancing inclusive, accurate, and empowering opportunities to engage with history. Our network of history museums is a critical part of the necessary work to bolster our larger cultural infrastructure in Maryland, but we need the State of Maryland's support to continue our innovation and public service, leaving no history behind.

Sincerely,

Kevin Cabrera
Secretary, Maryland Museum Association