



The Urban Winery of Silver Spring  
2315 Stewart Ave  
Silver Spring, MD 20910

February 20, 2024

The Honorable Marc Korman  
and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee  
House Office Building  
6 Bladen St.  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chairperson, Korman and Members of the Committee:

This morning on their way to school I told my family, my wife Georgia, daughter Sophia, my son Stephen and Stella my youngest that I was going to Annapolis to ask for a sign to help people find our business. Together we have been through a tough situation over these weeks, months, and years. What a journey our family has been over the last 3 years. From chaos, closure, moving our business location, rebuilding, uncertainty, struggle, strife. We have been through a lot to say the least, as have many. If the TAC Signage program was funded and functioning when we first applied back in September 2016, and every year since. In fact, our business was skipped back in 2019. We know this because a fellow winery in Olney received their TAC signage back in Oct of 2019. Why were we skipped at that time? No explanation provided. Would it have been any better if we had had the TAC signage program? We all would say, Yes Absolutely! Will it make an impact today and tomorrow? Yes. Absolutely for our future. The future of our family, future our business, future of our commitment in supporting our small business community. Yes. Yes. Yes.

This is the second year I sit before you to see where the progress of this issue has led us. Where are we in this much needed and growing need for this economic development initiative? Last year the report of an overwhelming back log and extremely under budgeted issues plagued this SHA program. Has that been addressed? Undoubtedly, the uncertainty and the reasons of the programs past failures is now becoming a sense of urgency building among our growing industry that has now shifted to eagerness and active involvement. That has led us here today. I am here to share with you and to highlight the positive impact of these appropriations to this SHA run TAC wayfaring signage program. I am happy and encouraged by the fact that Del. SOLOMON and Sen. Zucker and their team took the time to respond, asked questions and brought forth the opportunity for me to readdress you today.

I am here today to ask that we work to place the eligible small business tourism attraction signs and the Urban Winery of Silver Spring off exit 31 Georgia Ave on the map so all who come through our region are aware of the tourism attraction in Silver Spring to see what we have to offer. We must invest, to grow and survive. History has shown that it is through the small family business industry that communities thrive and grow. The sense of belonging and wanting to raise families here and encourage others to share what we have, our values, our

kindness and the richness of our agriculture. VA and others have done it. We have small businesses doing it, but tourists and locals alike often have no idea where we are. Trust me on a weekly basis I set up often at Farmers Markets and folks are shocked how long our business has been in Maryland in such a vibrant area and have never seen a sign? How do we change that? How do you help us put Urban Winery and other eligible businesses on the map? I may have boundless energy, but help us do this and trust me it will help grow the Ag-Tourism industry and the sense of other small businesses are thriving in Maryland after such a difficult period of time.

The impact is felt all the way down the grape vine. The value add it provides to our local communities, with jobs, our districts, and national recognition of our Great State of Maryland. The proof is 113,000 jobs. The \$2.1 Billion in state and local revenue. Imagine if we had a TAC sign for all the eligible tourism attractions over the last number of years. Can we guess if the revenues would go up? Yes of course. We contribute positively to the healthy growing and diverse economy of Maryland Agriculture that has been created over the last 10 years. Called the Craft Beverage industry.

The last sign to be placed by SHA was years ago and the backlog of eligible businesses is not growing at an alarming rate as previously stated. During my yearlong research into this topic, the TAC signage growth is moderate. Answer me this, how many marinas, campgrounds or golf courses are submitted? The answer is limited but the program also provides for Wineries and we are growing. In fact it is Governor Moore top initiative to support Maryland Agriculture, an industry we are intimately tied to. Currently, there are no more than 24 other wineries who would benefit greatly from this program, just like the previous program provided when the SHA was funded, these wineries are thriving. Those wineries, campgrounds, marinas are all still thriving to this day. Why is that so difficult to place a few signs that are already approved and are eligible? The tax revenue for the 275 wineries, breweries, distilleries and the other small business recipients is paid back in dividends. I am just 1 of these eligible businesses for the TAC program. However, today I am representing the MWA as a board member. We have 20+ members who will benefit from this unique Ag-tourism signage program. It will assist the growing population of Marylanders but also reach the non-Marylanders traveling in and out of our Nation's Capital, and those who live, work, entertain and commute to Maryland.

In closing the impact of the TAC signage program will indeed have a huge positive impact. For my business, for Pam, Julie and many others business it will make a significant economic difference. Increase revenues, increase in tax revenue, increase in job creation, increase in awareness of a growing agricultural industry, increase national recognition of quality and service hospitality that our great state of Maryland is open for business and growing and thriving. Growing in many areas and the craft beverage, hospitality service industry was hit particularly hard will lead the way. So please join me, fund this TAC program and most importantly DRINK MARYLAND WINE. Thank you.

Respectfully,

Damon Callis  
Vintner and CEO  
The Urban Winery of Silver Spring