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Appropriations Committee

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Committee

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

HB 1032 Testimony –TAC Signage Act
February 23, 2024
House Environment and Transportation Committee

Chair Korman, Vice Chair Boyce, colleagues, thank you for the opportunity to present on my bill HB1032 that reinvigorates the Maryland Tourist Area and Corridor (TAC) Signing Program operated by the Maryland Department of Transportation State Highway Administration (MDOT SHA) in partnership with the Maryland Department of Commerce (Commerce). Attraction signs are necessary to direct visitors to cultural and recreational activities. TAC Signing is a system of supplemental guide signs which directs drivers to eligible individual attractions by first directing them to groups of attractions. These attractions are grouped into geographical areas and sub-areas. Mainline signs on expressways or major highways direct drivers to the geographical area. Then ramp and conventional road area signs lead drivers to the corridor from which all individual attractions are located. Each individual attraction has a trailblazing sign at the turn for each location.

To be eligible for TAC signing, attractions must meet a set of requirements, and is subject to space availability, as determined by SHA regulations and requirements. An eligible attraction must primarily provide recreational, historical, cultural, or leisure activities to the public and meet or adhere to a long list of criteria. HB 1038 would codify TAC, as it is currently operating without funding or statutory authority. The bill would keep most of the program the same with some additions. It allows for additional attractions deemed important to the state or local economy to be eligible even if they do not meet all the existing requirements. Any attraction granted an exception will be publicly posted on the TAC website.

It also adds breweries and distilleries to the eligible attractions for signing with a generic symbol. This is consistent with how wineries are already treated in the TAC program. The generic symbol and criteria for brewery and distillery eligibility will be determined by SHA and Commerce in consultation with a geographically diverse set of community stakeholders, including state leaders in the brewing and distilling industry, local elected officials, local economic development officials, and leaders in the tourism industry.

The inclusion of generic symbols on signs will allow viewers to directly “read off” the intended meaning based on the familiar symbol. This will encourage more travelers to stop and patronize the business when they recognize the proposed symbol for breweries and distilleries. Signs are crucial

for businesses to attract new customers and grow their business overall. I consider these signs a crucial piece of the “last mile” marketing the state provides to support our businesses.

Lastly, under this bill each applicant who is approved for a sign under the Tourist Area and Corridor Signage Program will pay the entire cost of manufacturing and installation of the sign as well as an annual administrative fee once the sign is installed.

I am continuing to work with representatives of MDOT SHA on amendments to the bill, ensuring we develop a coherent, effective, and equitable process to revitalize and expand the TAC program. As you can see from the testimony submitted and the witnesses with us today, this bill is supported by Cultivate & Craft, Tourism Agencies, businesses, and Chambers of Commerce across Maryland.

Thank you for your consideration and I ask for a favorable report on HB 1032.