



February 23, 2024

**The Honorable Marc Korman Chair
House Environment & Transportation Committee**

Re: HB-1032

Position: Support

Chair Marc Korman and Committee Members:

On behalf of the Maryland Tourism Coalition (MTC) and our members, I am writing to express our **SUPPORT** for Highways-Tourist Area and Corridor Signage Program, HB1032. The Maryland Tourism Coalition is a 5016C, representing all sectors of the Tourism industry across the state.

The TAC sign program while considered a way finding program by the State Highway Administration, it also acts as a marketing tool for the businesses who are approved through the program's application process. The Maryland Tourism Coalition, along with the Maryland Office of Tourism and the State Highway Administration are the ones who are responsible for approving the applications. Currently, three counties have not completed construction (Anne Arundel, Howard and Baltimore) and 3 counties are placed on hold with back logged applications because the program ran out of funding (Somerset, Wicomico & Worcester). The way the program currently is funded is through the MD gas tax and falls under the Department of Transportation who has recently been told they need to cut their budget by 8%. This puts the program at the bottom of the list. The proposed legislation would have the applicant have to pay a fee for the design and installation of the sign as well as annual fee for the sign to remain on the highway. A revenue currently not included in the Transportation budget.

Prior to this sign program, where the six counties above are stuck is called State of Maryland Tourism Attraction Sign Program that hasn't been revised since 2015. There is an annual fee to participate, estimated at \$525-\$1000 a year and includes regular maintenance of the signs. As the program we are discussing, there is certain criteria to be met as well as guidelines for highway placement. There is also current signage displayed that have closed that still remains up on the highways today.

If we don't re-evaluate the TAC sign program, it will simply go away. There are businesses that are willing to pay for the signage. Again, they would have to fill out the application and meet the application requirements. They cannot just pay and get sign placement wherever they deem appropriate.

Tourism is a very important part of Maryland's economy. In fact, it is the 10th largest private sector employer, creating 187,296 jobs. Tourism generates \$2.3 billion in state and local taxes saving Maryland households nearly \$1,000 annually in state taxes. For every \$1 spent on marketing tourism by the Maryland Office of Tourism, \$31

comes back to the Maryland economy. The TAC sign program helps both domestic and especially international visitors to their destination from the highways.

While the role of the State Highway Administration is to get drivers through the state swiftly & safely, the TAC signs are an important tool to navigating the state, especially in rural areas where cell phone reception may be spotty. And again, the signage helps keep people off their phones while driving. The signs, while not created to be a marketing tool, are just that. When you are driving down 70 and you see a sign for one of these attractions, you may not stop then, but you may on your way back or plan a trip for another time.

When we invest in tourism, we all win. We urge you to approve this bill with amendments to fund the TAC Signage Program. Please feel free to reach out to me directly with any questions.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ruth Toomey

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