



WASHINGTON COUNTY Arts Council

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Name: Nicole Abuhamada, Executive Director

Organization: Washington County Arts Council

Issue: SB0980/HB1327

Position: Favorable

Date: 2/28/2024

Senate Budget and Taxation Committee, March 4, 2025

House Environment and Transportation, March 5, 2025

I am writing in support of SB0980/HB1327, legislation that will open the possibility of a greater share of the restricted Program Open Space fund for the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority (MHAA). The statute will allow for up to \$12 million to be appropriated for MHAA. Most of the MHAA budget is awarded in grants to nonprofits and government units, for projects that contribute to place-based heritage tourism. The impact of MHAA grants is already well documented, and it will grow as the MHAA budget grows.

As the Executive Director of the Washington County Arts Council, my local heritage area is the Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area, a nonprofit serving Carroll, Frederick and Washington Counties. I am proud that the Washington County Arts Council, with MHAA grant support, has contributed to statewide heritage area program impact: \$2.4 billion in economic contribution, 40,000 jobs supported and sustained, \$320 million in local and state tax revenues generated annually.

For FY26, we request \$18,000 in MHAA grant support for *Painting the Past: The Legacy of Historic Hagerstown*, a heritage tourism initiative designed to generate economic impact through cultural tourism. This project will feature a self-guided historical tour, commissioned fine art paintings by local master artists who will depict historic sites as they appear a century or more ago, and an educational documentary. A collaboration between the Washington County Arts Council, the Washington County Historical Society, and the Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area, this initiative will enhance public engagement, preserve local history, and drive tourism revenue.

When funded under the current statute, up to \$6 million may be budgeted annually for MHAA, with \$5.1 million available for grants. That's far too little; many worthy projects are unfunded, which means loss of ROI for local communities and the state. Please support SB2980/HB1327, which will make way for up to \$12 million in POS funds to be transferred to the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority.

For the sake of all Marylanders, I hope you will support SB0980/HB1327.