

March 2, 2025

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Budget & Taxation Committee
3 West Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: SB980 – Natural Resources – Maryland Heritage Areas Authority – Funding and Grants

Dear Chairman Guzzone and Members of the Committee:

The Allegany County Chamber of Commerce appreciates your support of the Maryland Heritage Area Authority full funding during the current and previous legislative sessions.

Because these grants are investments that return economic contribution, tax revenue and jobs to Maryland, full funding is important to the economic wellbeing of Marylanders. The tremendous return on investment has recently been documented in the Economic Contribution Analysis commissioned by the Maryland Heritage Area Authority. The statewide economic impact of this \$6 million program is \$2.4 billion, with \$319 million in annual tax revenue (state and local), and with over 33,000 jobs supported and maintained.

Maryland can't afford to miss out on the economic return from investment by the work of Maryland's Heritage Areas. Maryland is stronger for the foundation of 13 certified heritage areas contributing to vibrant communities throughout Maryland. In the Passages of the Western Potomac Heritage Area, grants, technical assistance, and marketing make a difference to such places as the Allegany Museum, Allegany County Historical Society, Allegany County Tourism office, and the Frostburg Mainstreet Program and so many others, including the Chamber of Commerce, which was fortunate to receive funding in 2024, which was used to help preserve the historic building where our organization is housed.

I urge you to support MHAA at the current \$6 million provided for in the FY26 Department of Planning budget.

I also want to alert you to a pending statute change (bill number not yet assigned) that would provide a greater share of Program Open Space (state side only) – **up to** \$12 million annually – to invest in heritage tourism projects through MHAA grants. Future funding at \$12 million would generate greater economic return while coming closer to meeting needs expressed by our nonprofit and local government partners.

Lastly, I am concerned about SB 321, a BRFA bill that would transfer \$340,000 from heritage area funding to Department of Planning administration. If successful, this will essentially eliminate three major capital grants and one major noncapital grant that would otherwise be contributing to economic well being at state and local levels.

Now, more than ever, we need Maryland's Heritage Areas to flourish. While elevating a strong sense of regional pride and historical character, Heritage Areas attract talent, increase tourism revenues, enhance business development, and fortify local economies.

Please approve a fully funded MHAA budget. Let Maryland's heritage areas continue to benefit our citizenry by stimulating economic growth in the State through heritage tourism and preservation. Thank you!

Sincerely,



Juli McCoy
President & CEO

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cc: Allegany County Delegation