



## Senate Bill 980

### *Natural Resources - Maryland Heritage Areas Authority - Funding and Grants*

MACo Position:

To: Budget and Taxation Committee

### **LETTER OF INFORMATION**

Date: March 4, 2025

From: Karrington Anderson

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) offers the following **LETTER OF INFORMATION** on SB 980 for the Committee's consideration. SB 980 seeks to expand the ability of the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority to award grants and loans for managing certified heritage areas while also adjusting the funding allocation structure within the Program Open Space (POS) framework.

Since its inception in 1969, POS has enabled the State of Maryland and its counties to expand public access to recreational spaces and natural areas, delivering immense health and economic benefits to communities across the state. A previous introduction of the bill, which has since been withdrawn, would have redirected POS funds before the established state/county split, inadvertently affecting both state and local POS dollars. This shift could have disproportionately impacted medium and smaller counties, limiting their access to vital recreation and conservation funds.

MACo appreciates the willingness of the bill's sponsor to work with counties to address these concerns. The bill has since been drafted to ensure that it does not affect local POS funding, maintaining the existing balance in POS allocations. Counties value the role of heritage areas in preserving Maryland's cultural and historical assets and welcome efforts to enhance their sustainability—so long as such efforts do not inadvertently reduce dedicated resources for local parks and open spaces.

MACo thanks the sponsor and the Committee for their consideration of local priorities in this matter. Counties have no position on the underlying fundamentals on SB 980, but appreciate the Committee's consideration of the information outlined above.