



February 25, 2025

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

RE: Support for SB0980 - Natural Resources - Maryland Heritage Areas Authority - Funding and Grants

Chairman Guzzone and Members of the Committee,

My name is Matt Libber, and I am the Legislative Committee Chair for the Maryland Tourism Coalition (MTC). Maryland Tourism Coalition is a trade organization with members representing all areas of tourism in the State of Maryland. Our mission is to support businesses and organizations that cater to the tourism industry through education, networking, and advocacy. I am writing to express MTC's strong support for the **Natural Resources - Maryland Heritage Areas Authority - Funding and Grants** legislation. This vital initiative plays a crucial role in preserving Maryland's rich history, while simultaneously boosting local tourism and driving economic growth across our communities. Only Maryland and Pennsylvania have state heritage areas modeled after the successful national heritage area program to focus resources and attention on cultural tourism destinations. There are 13 heritage areas in Maryland touching every Maryland county and Baltimore City.

Maryland's heritage areas serve as cornerstones of cultural tourism, attracting visitors from across the nation and beyond. These areas highlight the diverse history, natural beauty, and cultural significance of our state, encouraging travel that supports local businesses, hospitality services, and artisan industries. By investing in these areas through increased funding and grants, we not only preserve Maryland's unique historical narrative but also stimulate job creation and foster community pride.

This legislation will empower the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority to continue the development of educational programs, historical site restorations, and cultural events—all of which enhance the visitor experience and increase tourism revenue. Studies consistently show that heritage tourism contributes significantly to local economies, with visitors spending more and staying longer when engaging with historic and cultural attractions. Maryland Heritage Areas are an economic engine throughout the state, with a \$7 return on investment for every \$1 in state funds. The current Heritage Area Program is capped at \$6M - this legislation would increase the cap to \$12M. The requested allocation of funds in this bill comes from the real estate transfer tax and will directly financially benefit our cultural tourism destinations and provide economic growth. Over the past three years, an \$8 million funding gap in Heritage Area grant requests verses the available funding has kept impactful tourism projects on the shelf instead of in your community. Maryland Heritage Areas contribute a combined total of \$2.4 billion to the Maryland economy, supports and sustains a combined total of 33,815 full-time and part-time jobs throughout the state, and generates \$319.8 million in economic impact.



**MARYLAND
TOURISM
COALITION**

Increased support for this legislation ensures that Maryland remains a vibrant destination for tourists while protecting the treasures that make our state distinctive. I urge you to champion this bill and help ensure the continued growth and vitality of Maryland's tourism sector.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration and we ask for a favorable report for SB0980.

Respectfully submitted,

Matt Libber
Legislative Chair
Maryland Tourism Coalition
mllibber@mdsoccerplex.org
301-528-1480