

Name: Gary Candelaria, President of the Board of Directors

Organization: Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area (HCWHA)

Issue: SB0980/HB1327

Position: Favorable

Date: February 28, 2025

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 preservation and place-based heritage tourism. The impact of MHAA grants is already well documented, and it will grow as the MHAA budget grows.

As a member of the Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area (HCWHA) Board of Directors and a Board member of the Sharpsburg Historical Society and the Sharpsburg Museum of History, I am proud of HCWHA's contributions 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.

It is gratifying to see the number of non-profit and state and local government entities that annually apply for the grants that HCWHA awards. These grants help preserve the history, culture, and beauty of the counties we serve, and improve the attractiveness of the counties to visitors. This in turn promotes the economic welfare of the cities and towns, and the residents of Washington, Frederick, and Carroll Counties. We could do so much more of this work with the requested funding increase from Program Open Space.

For FY26, HCWHA has received Intent to Apply notices from 34 nonprofits and government entities that will seek more than \$1.6 million in MHAA project grant awards. The projects will take place in Carroll, Frederick, and Washington Counties. We count our work to facilitate MHAA grants and assist grant applicants to present competitive applications, as one of our organizations highest, and most rewarding, duties. Yet, when funded under the current statute, up to \$6 million may be budgeted annually for MHAA, with \$5.1 million available for grants. That is far too little; many worthy projects are unfunded, which means loss of ROI for local communities and the state.

I urge you to support SB2980/HB1327, which does not include a spending mandate, but 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, please give HB2980/HB1327 your favorable vote.