



Testimony: SB980

Budget and Taxation Committee

Name: Lisa Challenger, Executive Director

Organization: Beach to Bay Heritage Area

Issue: MARYLAND HERITAGE AREAS PROGRAM

Maryland Department of Planning, FY2025 Budget Request: \$6,000,000

Position: Support full funding in FY26

The Beach to Bay Heritage Area appreciates your continued support of the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority full funding during the current and previous legislative sessions. For FY26, the \$6 million budgeted for the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority (MHAA) is a critical need. The program has received 236 Intent to Apply forms for exciting and meaningful grant possibilities, which represents a need that is more than double the current grant funds available. These grants are investments that return economic contribution, tax revenue and jobs to Maryland.

Heritage Areas are not just good for the soul; they are also very good for the wallet. For every \$1 Maryland invests in this program, it gets \$7 back. That means the statewide impact of \$6 million is \$2.4 billion pumped into the local economy every year and 40,000 jobs are supported from museum guards to trail builders to festival organizers.

In the Beach to Bay Heritage Area, these funds have supported the renovation effort of Henrys Hotel, Ocean City's first boarding house and hotel for blacks, new exhibits at Germantown School, a Rosenwald School, repairs to Furnace Town's historic Nassawango Iron Furnace, restoration of the skipjack, City of Crisfield and the Pocomoke Indian Nation, traveling exhibit. These five projects alone total more than \$250,000 in leveraged dollars.

Beach to Bay Heritage Area urges you to support MHAA at the current \$6 million provided for in the FY26 Department of Planning budget.

I'd also like to alert you to a pending statute change 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 bridging the gap with our nonprofit and local government partners.

Please approve a fully funded MHAA budget. Let Maryland's heritage areas continue to elevate and celebrate the collective stories of our heritage and cultural traditions.

Thank you!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lisa Challenger". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lisa Challenger, Beach to Bay Heritage Area

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