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Heritage Montgomery
Chair, Board of Directors

Issue: SB0980/HB1327

Position: Favorable

Senate Budget and Taxation Committee, March 4, 2025

House Environment and Transportation, March 5, 2025

Good afternoon, Committee Members. My name is Laura Anderson Wright. By day, I am a 30-year State employee who loves her job. But I'm also chair of the Board of Directors for Heritage Montgomery, former board member for the MoCo Arts & Humanities Council, Montgomery History, then called MoCo Historical Society, the Sandy Spring Slave Museum & African Art Gallery and the Historic Odd Fellows Lodge. I was raised & volunteered in: 14; lived in 18, 21, 17 and now 16; Thus, I am deeply invested in our State, its ideals and its rich heritage.

As board chair for Heritage Montgomery, I'm dedicated to the mission of preserving and promoting local history, culture, and distinctive natural areas, and fostering stewardship and economic development in Montgomery County, Maryland. When you support us, we support others 10 fold.

I am here to ask for your support of SB 980 cross-filed as HB 1327.

Here's the good news: I'm not asking you for money.

Here's the even *better* news: You'll continue to get a hefty return on your investment. In District 39 alone: we have funded Praterstown (FY 25 mini-grant and a site on the Governor's radar), Seneca Creek State Park (map brochures and building restoration) and Pleasant View (we have supported the restoration of the historic church and schoolhouse for the last 10 years with \$ and technical support).

The ask: I'm simply asking you to lift the cap on Maryland Heritage Areas Authority (MHAA) funding to allow the potential for more funding through Project Open Space.

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 chair of Heritage Montgomery Board of Directors (HM), I am incredibly proud of HM's contributions to the statewide heritage area program's impact: \$2.4 billion in economic contribution, 40,000 jobs supported and sustained, and \$320 million in local and state tax revenues generated annually.

I implore you to give SB 980/HB1327 a favorable report.

Thank you.