



Testimony to the Budget and Taxation Committee

Name: Gail Webb Owings, Executive Director

Organization: Eastern Shore Heritage, Inc. - Stories of the Chesapeake: The Heritage Area of Caroline, Kent, Queen Anne's, and Talbot Counties

Issue: **SB 0980 Natural Resources - Maryland Heritage Areas Authority - Funding and Grants**

Position: Support

The Stories of the Chesapeake Heritage Area enthusiastically supports SB0980 which will allow for lifting the cap on Maryland Heritage Area funding. The proposed legislation would allow the Maryland Heritage Areas program to receive up to \$12 million annually, lifting the current cap of \$6 million. The legislation does not mandate or guarantee funding but allows for this important program to receive a greater share of Program Open Space funding from the state's transfer tax, if and when it should become available.

Maryland's Heritage Area program is the most successful of its kind in the country and frequently used as a model for other states seeking to build a strong economic base in heritage tourism. Studies have repeatedly found that heritage tourists stay longer, spend more than any other travelers, and that Maryland is a highly desirable heritage tourism destination. This program is a primary tool for developing heritage projects which enhance both the visitor experience and quality of life for our residents.

Since its certification in 2004, the Stories of the Chesapeake Heritage Area has enabled over \$6.8 million in grants to more than 40 organizations. Recent projects supported include:

- ❖ Expansion of tourism offerings such as the restoration of the Hubbard – Leverage House (one of the few remaining documented safe houses on the Underground Railroad Byway);, the vessels Rosie Parks, Edna Lockwood and Tug Delaware; renovations of the Avalon Theatre, Hardee House, Matapeake Clubhouse; Heritage Walking Tours in Centreville, Kent Narrows, and the Hill; the Chestertown Waterfront Project, and the Sultana Lawrence Wetlands Center.
- ❖ Oral history and research projects for the region's African American heritage including the Rooted Wisdom program and Chesapeake Heartland Project, interpretation in Chestertown, Kent Narrows, Oxford, Rock Hall and on the Cross Island Trail; documentaries such as Kent Storied Landscapes, and Tilghman Island.
- ❖ Restoration of historic structures that become community-based facilities which also attract the traveling public: Betterton's community-built "Most Precious Blood" 1908 Catholic Church, to become a community center; Centreville's 1936 Kennard School, for community programs and exhibits on African-American heritage; Chestertown's Arts Council Building, Denton's 1901 high school, to house culinary arts programs; Federalsburg's Covey & Williams Garage (circa 1912) as a historical museum, Adkins Arboretum in Ridgely, to expand its natural resources education facility and viewing areas, Sumner Hall-one of the few remaining Grand Army Republic Halls, and the Frederick Douglass Park on the Tuckahoe.
- ❖ Archeology and interpretation at the Hill in Easton.

Unfortunately, many worthy projects have not been able to be funded, stalling projects that are community-building, enhance economic development, expand heritage tourism, support the arts, and ensure our cultural heritage inspires future generations. Please support SB0980.

