



TESTIMONY TO HOUSE ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

Issue: SUPPORT HB1327 (SB0980)

Natural Resources - Maryland Heritage Areas Authority - Funding and Grants

Date: 3/3/25

On behalf of Gateway Community Development Corporation, I am writing to express our strong support for SB0980 / HB1327, 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. While the legislation does not guarantee funding, it enables this vital program to receive a greater share of Program Open Space funding from the state's transfer tax if and when it becomes available.

The Maryland Heritage Area program is remarkable, with community-driven projects and initiatives that grow our local economies here in Maryland. The return on investment is stunning, with a \$7 return for every \$1 of state funding! Thousands of jobs are supported, and millions in state and local tax revenue are generated.

Gateway Community Development Corporation has benefited significantly from this program. As the steward of the Gateway Arts District, we have leveraged Heritage Area funding to support cultural programming, artist studios, and historic preservation initiatives that drive tourism and economic growth in our region. These investments have strengthened our community's identity, provided opportunities for artists and small businesses, and contributed to the overall vibrancy of our district.

So why this legislation? There is a \$6 million gap in funding ability each year, stalling high-impact projects. Grant levels have not been raised in 30 years, and this future funding will allow grant levels to rise to where they can be the most impactful in our counties, towns, and communities. In these difficult economic times, the Maryland Heritage Areas program is one of the solutions. The Maryland Heritage Areas cover a portion of every county in the state and the City of Baltimore. This program is the primary tool used to encourage heritage tourism to Maryland, where heritage/cultural visitors stay longer and spend more money in our communities.

We urge the Maryland General Assembly to support HB1327 (SB0980) to strengthen this essential program for Maryland's future.

Respectfully submitted,

Michelle Darden-Lee
Executive Director