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February 26, 2025

**The Honorable Chair Korman, and Vice-Chair Boyce
Environment & Transportation Committee**

**Re: Testimony on: HB1184 Port of Deposit State Historical Park - Size and Scope
Cross Bill: SB477
Position: Oppose
Hearing Date: 1:00 P.M., February 28, 2025**

Please accept this letter as opposition to HB1184, Port of Deposit State Historical Park – Size and Scope, which attempts to reduce the size of the proposed State Park from 120-150 acres to 12-19 acres, as well as, excluding the historic Tome School from inclusion within the proposed park, and delaying the transfer of the park land to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) until June 2026.

When the original bill was passed establishing the Historical Park, it accomplished multiple worthy goals, including preserving and restoring historical value and integrity of the original Tome School, and related buildings, as well as, Snow Hill (an early African-American community), while creating hiking trails, and outdoor areas that will benefit the state and local community, and be a destination for tourism.

The area within close proximity to the proposed park, is currently being heavily commercially developed, and within a 3 mile radius is the Perryville Casino, the Great Wolf Lodge, and multiple monstrous warehouses, compliments of the Bainbridge Development Corporation (BDC). It should be noted that there is significant ground in the area that is already slated for commercial development, including the remainder of the property located at the Bainbridge site, as well as, the Chesapeake Overlook and other areas in close proximity to the I-95 interchange. Meanwhile access to significant wooded park land, suitable for hiking, in the western part of Cecil County is extremely limited.

While population and development pressures are continuing to grow in Cecil County at a rapid pace, the County and its residents support additional park areas and open space, available to the public. Additionally, the tremendous value of preserving our history and heritage is meritorious. I understand that both Snow Hill and the Tome School are on national historic registries and have been recognized for their significance. These jewels should be preserved and shared with the public, not abandoned and forgotten, or allowed to further decay.

It is questionable judgment that this bill should be granted and allow BDC to retain authority over this property, as the BDC has had ample time and opportunity to create a feasible

Page Two
Chair Korman & Vice-Chair Boyce
Environment & Transportation Committee
February 26, 2025

plan for the property. The BDC's vision for the Bainbridge site has been limited to the establishment of warehouses, which is tantamount to soft economics, and of minimal benefit to people of the State of Maryland and does not improve the quality of life of those residing in Cecil County, or the Towns of Port Deposit or Perryville.

I have had the opportunity to review the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) report dated June 2024, and it appears that they have been conducting their due diligence, in relation to the Park, in a timely manner, and that they unequivocally believe in the value of the Historical Park from both perspectives of historical integrity and creating outdoor recreational space for the people of Maryland.

Further, from an environmental perspective, the Great Outdoors Act of 2022, as originally passed, establishes 150 wooded acres creating a significant buffer between the heavy industrial uses and warehouses, currently built by the BDC, and the Susquehanna River. This is an added benefit to the Chesapeake Bay, by denying this bill and creating the Port of Deposit State Historical Park as originally mandated.

The establishment of the Port of Deposit State Historical Park will be for perpetuity, and its opens spaces, architectural preservation, and education and historical lessons to be shared will inure to the benefit of generations of Marylanders, yet to come.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to express my opposition to SB477.

Yours very truly,



Karl H. Fockler

Chesapeake Heritage Conservancy, Inc., President (Skipjack Martha Lewis) 2018-Present
Cecil County Historic District Commission 2022-2024
Town of Charlestown Commissioner & Past President 2016-2022
Cecil County State's Attorney Office & Past Deputy State's Attorney 1998-2002 & 2013-2018