

WCHT testimony to Lift the Cap

Name: Ann Aldrich, Secretary

Organization: Washington County Historical Trust, Inc.

Issue: SB0980/HB1327

Position: Favorable

Date: March 3, 2025

House Environment and Transportation, March 5, 2025

I am writing in support of HB1327, legislation that will open the possibility of a greater share of the restricted Program Open Space fund for the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority (MHAA). 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 place-based heritage tourism. The impact of MHAA grants is already well documented, and it will grow as the MHAA budget grows.

As a Board member, of Washington County Historical Trust, Inc (WCHT), my local heritage area is the Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area, a nonprofit serving Carroll, Frederick and Washington Counties. I am proud that WCHT, with MHAA grant support, has contributed to the statewide heritage area program impact: \$2.4 billion in economic contribution, 40,000 jobs supported and sustained, \$320 million in local and state tax revenues generated annually.

MHAA has been a keystone funder for WCHT in our efforts to restore the 1797 Saylor House in Kiwanis Park, Hagerstown. The Saylor House serves as a 3-season classroom on the banks of the Antietam and approximately ½ way down the Antietam Water Trail. The Park has a public boat ramp to the Antietam below the house. The house serves as a fantastic interpretive site for pre-history to today representing prehistoric archaeological findings, historic settlement patterns, historic buildings and trades, the Antietam Canal, early fish conservation legislation, a civil war skirmish along the Gettysburg retreat route, through today's development along the Eastern Blvd corridor. MHAA has funded matching grants in FY22 (\$30,849) & FY25 (\$8,667) which WCHT has leveraged more than 4-times over with funds from other foundations, individual donors and volunteers to restore the kitchen wing as an accessible meeting and classroom; rebuilt chimneys; completed structural repairs; repaired floors and replaced the buildings roof. A unique part of our restoration process is incorporating archaeological workshops to document artifacts found in and around the house and historic building skills workshops in which participants learned the proper techniques to repair the lime mortar pointing, exterior woodwork, repairing and re-plastering with lime plaster and how to preserve, repair and restore wooden windows.

These funds were the game changer to restore this house abandoned in 1965 and given to the City of Hagerstown in 2013. The early unaltered stone house would have been demolished without this support. The building is now an asset in the historic tourism fabric of Washington County.

For FY26, we are requesting MHAA grant support for a \$25,000 matching grant to complete the restoration of the interior of the house in order to open the space to celebrate America's 250th anniversary. Completing the house restoration will add more meeting and display space to the already available kitchen wing and adding a key City Landmark to the historic tourism map.

When funded under the current statute, up to \$6 million may be budgeted annually for MHAA, with \$5.1 million available for grants. That's far too little; many worthy projects are unfunded, which means loss of ROI for local communities and the state. Please support SB2980/HB1327, which will make way for up to \$12 million in POS funds to be transferred to the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority.

For the sake of all Marylanders, I hope you will support SB0980/HB1327.