



Washington College

TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE BUDGET AND TAXATION COMMITTEE

Name: Adam Goodheart, Director

Organization: Starr Center for the Study of the American Experience, Washington College

Issue: **SUPPORT HB1327**

Natural Resources - Maryland Heritage Areas Authority - Funding and Grants

Date: March 3, 2025

Washington College's Starr Center for the Study of the American Experience wishes to express full and enthusiastic support for of the legislative initiative 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. It 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.

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! Also, thousands of jobs are supported, and millions in state and local tax revenue is generated.

Our organization, the Starr Center for the Study of the American Experience, has received four MHAA grants that have allowed us to help build the heritage tourism infrastructure of the Eastern Shore. Our public programs supported by MHAA engage thousands of Marylanders and visitors each year, including hundreds of K-12 students and teachers. The state funding that MHAA has provided has helped up leverage its program and capital support to win much larger federal grants that support salaried positions. The MHAA is also helping us to preserve, share, and celebrate the African American history and culture of the Eastern Shore, upholding the role of the Chesapeake Bay watershed as the heartland of our nation's Black heritage.

This legislation would close a \$6 million annual gap in funding ability that has stalled high-impact projects. Grant levels have not been raised in 30 years, and this future funding will allow the 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.

Respectfully submitted,

Adam Goodheart, Director
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