



Senator Pamela Beidle, Chair
Senator Antonio Hayes, Vice-Chair
Senate Finance Committee
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: Senate Bill 365/House Bill 541: Department of Commerce – Nonprofit Organizations Navigator – Established. SUPPORT

February 13, 2025

Dear Chairwoman Beidle and Senate Finance Committee Members:

On behalf of the Western Maryland Scenic Railroad and our board members, I write this letter in support of *Senate Bill 365/House Bill 541: Department of Commerce – Nonprofit Organizations Navigator – Established*.

As written, SB365/HB541, would establish a nonprofit organizations navigator within the Department of Commerce to provide assistance to nonprofit organizations. Specifically, this new position would:

- (1) provide technical assistance to nonprofit organizations in obtaining access to and applying for state grant programs;*
- (2) work with nonprofits and units of State government to resolve complexities and delays in State grant-making processes;*
- (3) collect and share certain information; and*
- (3) represent nonprofits interest and concerns as a member of the Maryland Efficient Grant Application Council.*

The WMSR has been providing railroad excursions for over 30 years in the heart of Mountain Maryland, with a focus on heritage railroading through preservation, restoration, operation, education, and visitor experience. Our railroad is a destination for travelers from across the globe and is a vital component of the economy in the Cumberland, MD-WV Metropolitan Statistical Area. The historic steam locomotive #1309, has become the star of our collection and has been attracting visitors and regional citizenry to Western Maryland since the Spring of 2022. Since 1988, guests have enjoyed various revenue-generating events as the railroad's culture has changed over 37 years.

There are numerous reasons for the continued growth and success of our organization, including the ongoing financial support by the Administration and the Maryland General Assembly. Through the

state's investments in operational and capital funding, WMSR serves as a foundation for tourism, hospitality, and commerce in Western Maryland through employee development, providing a world-class visitor experience, and driving economic impact for the future.

The rising costs continue to plague the Railroad's operational and maintenance needs. For WMSR to sustain its daily services, our railroad construction consultants have indicated a need for approximately \$3 million to bring our track/right-of-way to Class 2 standards, and an annual need of \$1 million to keep the railroad in a good state of repair.

On an annual basis, the Railroad lobbies for state assistance and pursues every meaningful grant opportunity that is available. With that said, these tasks can be complex and overwhelming for both staff and volunteers. The process of searching for viable state grants and completing the stages of receiving state grants requires persistent communications and time between the Railroad and our grant contacts within the Department of Legislative Services and the Executive Secretary's Office for the Board of Public Works.

With the establishment of non-profit navigator, it would provide a direct point of contact for organizations, like WMSR, that still have difficulties searching for new funding sources or requiring support throughout the grant approval process. In short, the new navigator would be an integral connection between the Department and non-profit organizations statewide and a needed voice on the Maryland Efficient Grant Application Council.

It is for these reasons that WMSR proudly supports the passage of this legislation and respectfully requests a **FAVORABLE** report on Senate Bill 365/ House Bill 541 by this committee.

Thank you for your consideration. Should you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me directly at wheinz@wmsr.com.

Regards,



Wesley Heinz
Executive Director
Western Maryland Scenic Railroad Development Corporation
www.wmsr.com