



THE COMMISSIONERS OF THURMONT

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Testimony: SB 638, Senate Budget & Taxation Committee

HB 654, House Environment and Transportation Committee

Position: FAVORABLE

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The Maryland Heritage Authority (MHAA) program is a powerful contributor to Maryland's economy. SB 638 and HB 654 will pave the way for even greater return on MHAA investment. By "lifting the cap" on this unique program, the state will be positioned to harness the economic potential of Maryland's heritage areas in future years. These bills represent an important step forward for the State of Maryland and for the residents of Carroll, Frederick and Washington counties who are served by the Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area.

The MHAA is not funded through the general fund; it is funded through Program Open Space (property transfer tax). MHAA funding is a restricted line within Program Open Space funding and is *not part of the Program Open Space formula*.

Current law allows "up to" \$6 million allocated statewide for this program. Over \$5.1 million goes directly back to our communities by way of grants for economic stimulus. Returning that investment is a remarkable \$7 for every \$1 of state funding. There are far more requests for funding than this program can provide at its current level. This year alone, the grant requests are for over \$12 million, projects and services that will stimulate tourism spending, sustain and support jobs, and generate state and local taxes.

The significant impact of the current funding levels can be seen in Maryland's museums, parks, trails, towns, cities, main streets, forests, waterways, and more. Thanks to this funding, Thurmont has been able to add four gateway signs welcoming visitors and residents at all four gateway entrances in our town. We have also benefited from MHA funds for wayfaring signs throughout the town which identify key attractions.

There is no fiscal mandate associated with this legislation. The language is careful to state "may" and "up to" rather than "shall." This is important, as the bill sponsors are aware of current budgetary constraints both for the general fund and for Program Open Space funds. **This is a legislative adjustment to a capped program to allow for future growth and is not a current funding request.**

The town of Thurmont recognizes the thoughtful intent behind this legislation and believes its passage will result in meaningful and positive outcomes for our State. We are confident that these bills strike an appropriate balance between recognizing current budget constraints and providing an avenue for future growth, thus reinforcing Maryland's commitment to effective governance and responsible stewardship.

For these reasons, the town of Thurmont respectfully urges favorable consideration and passage of **SB 638 and HB 654** during the current legislative session.

Thank you for your continued leadership and dedication to the people of Maryland.

Best,



Vickie Grinder
Economic Development Manager
Town of Thurmont