



HEART OF CHESAPEAKE COUNTRY HERITAGE AREA

Dear Members of the Maryland General Assembly,

On behalf of the Heart of the Chesapeake Heritage Area in Dorchester County, I am writing to express our strong support for HB0654 and SB0638, legislation that would lift the outdated \$6 million statutory cap on the Maryland Heritage Areas Program.

Since 1996, Maryland's 13 certified Heritage Areas have served as a cornerstone for heritage tourism, economic development, and community revitalization across the state. Covering portions of every county and Baltimore City, the program has demonstrated that small state investments generate significant statewide impact.

Maryland's Heritage Areas are proven economic drivers. Collectively, they generate \$319.8 million in tax revenue and deliver strong returns to local communities. At the current \$6 million funding level, more than \$5.1 million flows directly back into Maryland communities each year to support local projects, historic sites, museums, trails, events, partnerships, and revitalization initiatives.

However, demand for Heritage Area grants now far exceeds the statutory cap. This year alone, more than \$12 million in grant requests were submitted—double the amount the program is permitted to award. As a result, eligible, community-driven projects go unfunded each year.

HB0654 and SB0638 offer a smart, simple fix. The legislation does not mandate new spending; it merely removes the outdated cap, preserving the State's flexibility to invest in the program when revenues allow. Lifting the cap ensures Maryland can respond to rising demand, leverage additional partner investment, and remain competitive with other states that are actively investing in heritage tourism.

For Dorchester County and the communities we serve through the Heart of the Chesapeake Heritage Area, this flexibility is critical. Heritage tourism strengthens our small towns, supports local businesses, preserves our cultural and environmental

assets, and creates meaningful economic opportunity.

Investing in Maryland's heritage is investing in Maryland's future. We respectfully urge your favorable consideration of HB0654 and SB0638 and your continued support for the Maryland Heritage Areas Program.

Thank you for your leadership and commitment to strengthening communities across our state.

Sincerely,

Holly Gilpin

Tourism & Heritage Area Director
Heart of the Chesapeake Heritage Area
Dorchester County, Maryland