

Testimony:

SB 638, Senate Budget & Taxation Committee
HB 654, House Environment and Transportation Committee

Position: FAVORABLE

From: Samuel M. Riley, 409 Washington Avenue, Suite 600, Towson, MD,
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My name is Samuel M. Riley. I am an attorney and serve on several nonprofit boards. Among my nonprofit roles: I serve as the president of the Union Mills Homestead Foundation, which operates a small museum and historic site located north of Westminster, in Carroll County, MD. I support SB 638/HB 654, which are a classic “win-win” for the State of Maryland, and will strengthen the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority (MHAA) program.

MHAA contributes substantially to Maryland’s economy. SB 638 and HB 654 will allow for even greater return on MHAA’s investment in our communities. By lifting the current cap on funding for this unique program, Maryland can better harness investments in Maryland’s heritage areas for years to come. These bills represent an important step forward for the State of Maryland and for residents of Carroll, Frederick and Washington counties who are served by the Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area.

An important note is that MHAA is **not** funded through the general fund; instead, it is funded through Program Open Space funding. Current law allows “up to” \$6 million to be allocated statewide for this program. Each year, over \$5.1 million goes directly back to our communities by way of grants that act as economic stimulus. My experience has been that there are more requests for funding than this program can provide at its current level. Many project requests are declined due to the current cap on funding.

Across our region there are numerous examples of successful projects that were made possible due to MHAA funding. For instance, the Union Mills Homestead just finished a large project to develop a Preservation Plan for the historic Shriver Homestead, the house museum at the site. MHAA funded a large portion of this project, which will not only help preserve the historic site but serve to guide future bricks and mortar work.

The proposed legislation will help expand these opportunities to other worthy projects. There is no fiscal mandate associated with this legislation, instead the bill carefully provides that language like “may” and “up to” rather than “shall.” With our current

budgetary constraints, it is notable that this legislation will not add to deficits but instead will simply adjust a capped program to allow for future growth.

I would like to commend the thought behind this legislation and believe its passage will provide many benefits for our State. The proposed legislation strikes an appropriate balance between recognizing current budget constraints and providing an avenue for future growth, reflecting responsible stewardship of public resources.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge favorable consideration and passage of SB 638 and HB 654 during the current legislative session.

Thank you for your service to the people of Maryland.

Respectfully Submitted,

Samuel M. Riley