



Testimony to the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

Name: Brigitte Carty Executive Director

Organization: Lower Susquehanna Heritage Greenway

Issue: **SUPPORT SB0638 (HB0654)**
Natural Resources - Maryland Heritage Areas Authority - Funding and Grants

Date: February 20, 2026

The Lower Susquehanna Heritage Greenway (LSHG) is in FULL SUPPORT of the legislative initiative SB0638 which will allow for lifting the cap on Maryland Heritage Areas' funding. The proposed legislation would allow the Maryland Heritage Areas program to receive up to \$12 million annually (from Transfer Tax revenues – NOT the General Fund), lifting the current cap of \$6 million.

Heritage Areas have proven to be an impactful community economic driver!

There is a \$6 million gap in funding ability each year, stalling 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.

Please Note:

- These potential future funds DO NOT come from the General Fund. Instead, they are allocated from Maryland's Program Open Space (POS), a fund created in 1969 by the State Legislature, that receives a portion of the 0.5% Real Estate Transfer Tax.
- The Transfer Tax, that provides funding for POS, is paid by homebuyers to support the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority and heritage area grants, the acquisition of land for public open space such state and local parks, and the preservation of farmland.

- POS, designed to link development to funding for community development, open space and recreational facilities, is a State-Promise made to every homebuyer that a portion of their home purchase cost will support Maryland's Heritage Areas Community Development efforts, greenspace initiatives, and recreational endeavors.
- This legislation DOES NOT guarantee funding but allows for the Heritage Areas Program to receive a greater share of Program Open Space funding, if and when it should become available.

The LSHG is a non-profit certified Maryland Heritage Area located in Harford and Cecil Counties along the Lower Susquehanna River and Upper Bay. The LSHG's mission is to encourage regional economic development through heritage tourism primarily by supporting public recreation efforts, particularly trail development and public water access, historic preservation, cultural interpretation, and conservation efforts.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brigitte C. Carty". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Brigitte C. Carty
Executive Director

Attachments:

- Maryland Heritage Areas Fact Sheet



Small Investments. Statewide Impact. Lift the Cap on Heritage Area Funding

Maryland's Heritage Areas Deliver Big Returns for Local Communities

Maryland's 13 Heritage Areas are economic powerhouses: drawing visitors, boosting local businesses, supporting jobs, and generating **\$319.8 million in tax revenue** that benefits communities across our state. The current Maryland Heritage Areas Program funding level of \$6 million delivers strong returns. **More than \$5.1 million flows directly back** into Maryland communities each year, supporting projects, partnerships, historic sites, museums, trails, events, and local revitalization work.

An Outdated Funding Cap Is Holding the Program Back

Despite its success, the program is limited by a **\$6 million statutory cap** that prevents the program from growing, even in years when the administration has the capacity to invest more. **Over \$12 million in grant requests** were submitted this year alone, double the cap-limited amount the program can award.



As a result, **eligible, community-driven projects go unfunded** each year.



The **cap limits future growth**, even in strong fiscal years.

HB0654 & SB0638: A Smart, Simple Fix

It is a straightforward "lift the cap" bill:

It **does not mandate** new funding. It simply **removes the outdated cap**, allowing the program to grow **in future years if and when state revenues permit**.

This ensures Maryland can continue responding to rising demand, supporting high-impact local projects, and remaining competitive with other states investing in heritage tourism.

This legislation does not ask the state to spend more today. It preserves Maryland's flexibility to invest wisely when resources allow.

What This Means for Maryland's Communities

With the cap lifted, Maryland has the option to:



Support more local projects that strengthen towns, counties, and Main Streets in years when funding is available.



Leverage more partner investment by increasing program capacity when the state is able.



Respond to growing interest in heritage tourism statewide.



Expand access and opportunity for communities across all regions of Maryland.

Maryland has **13 certified Heritage Areas**, covering portions of **every county and Baltimore City**. Since 1996, the Heritage Areas Program has been a cornerstone for driving heritage tourism, celebrating local stories, and supporting economic growth across the state.

Learn more at marylandheritageareas.org.

INVEST IN MARYLAND'S HERITAGE. INVEST IN MARYLAND'S FUTURE.