

Testimony: SB 638, Senate Budget & Taxation Committee
Position: **FAVORABLE**
Date: February 16, 2026
From: Elizabeth Scott Shatto, Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area
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The Maryland Heritage Areas Authority (MHAA) program is a powerful contributor to Maryland's economy. HB 654/SB 638 will pave the way for even greater return on MHAA investment. By "lifting the cap", 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 Maryland Heritage Area Authority is not funded through the general fund; it is funded through Program Open Space (property transfer tax). The Maryland Heritage Area 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. Return on 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. 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. In the Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area, that includes several grants devoted to preserving and interpreting resources associated with the Catocin Furnace, possibly the fastest growing tourism draw in Frederick County. In Washington County, heritage area grants helped develop the Cultural Arts Trail, a pathway that guides visitors to major cultural heritage destinations throughout Hagerstown. Recent Carroll County projects included preservation of the c. 1760 Durbin House in Wakefield Valley Park and an innovative digital catalogue and tour app for the historic Westminster Cemetery. All these brief examples bring economic value to the organizations, towns, and people we serve.

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 Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area 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 Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area respectfully urges favorable consideration and passage of HB **654/SB 638**.

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

Respectfully submitted,



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