



**AARCH Society**

**P.O. Box 3903  
Frederick, MD 21705**

**aarchsociety@gmail.com  
www.aarchsociety.org**

*Until the story  
of the hunt is  
told by the Lion,  
the tale of the hunt  
will always glorify  
the hunter.*

- AFRICAN PROVERB

February 20, 2026

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

**Position:** **FAVORABLE**

The Maryland Heritage Areas 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 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. A previous Maryland Heritage Areas Authority grant provided critical support to the African American Resources Cultural & Heritage Society (AARCH) by helping offset the costs of furnishings, exterior signage and awnings, and upgraded security systems of the African American Heritage Center—investments that will enhance the organization's visibility, visitor experience, and protection of collections in Frederick County. A future grant to support *Soundtrack of Freedom* will build on that infrastructure by activating the improved space with dynamic public programming, expanding heritage tourism during the county's 250th anniversary period, and strengthening AARCH's long-term sustainability through increased attendance, partnerships, and educational impact for generations to come.

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.**

AARCH Society 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 AARCH Society 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.

Sincerely,

Olivia G. White, Ph.D. [whiteog@gmail.com](mailto:whiteog@gmail.com); 240-446-9086

Board President

African American Resources - Cultural and Heritage Society, Inc