

LSHG's SB0638 Testimony - 2026.pdf

Uploaded by: Brigitte Carty

Position: FAV



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.

Letter of testimony request.pdf

Uploaded by: Christopher Stapleton

Position: FAV



Testimony: SB 638, Senate Budget & Taxation Committee

HB 654, House Environment and Transportation Committee

Position: FAVORABLE

From: Christopher Stapleton, CEO, Simiosys, 1706 Dahlgren Road, Middletown MD, 21769, (407) 697-0381

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing this letter to show my support of Maryland's Heritage Areas Authority (MHAA) programs and services. They have shown such successful collaboration between the State's agencies, programs as well as building synergy between commercial, civic and academic sectors of the state.

I am speaking as a citizen, educator and small business owner. The MHAA is one of the reasons that I am moving my global enterprise to Maryland. I look forward to applying a career of multiple international awards, in pioneering innovation (2025 IEEE Test of Time Award), over a dozen cultural heritage tourism awards (Amusement Business Golden Tickets), and numerous Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) Awards. (DoEd, DoD, etc.).

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. We



are presently able to bring multiple local and national organizations support for future project grant applications because of this. 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.**

Simiosys, LLC 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, Simiosys, LLC 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.

Yours,

Christopher Stapleton, CEO

simiosys@me.com

www.Simiosys.com

Co-Founder www.VirtualWorldSociety.org

[Profile link](#)

[Publications Link](#)

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Letter of testimony request.pdf

Uploaded by: Christopher Stapleton

Position: FAV



Testimony: SB 638, Senate Budget & Taxation Committee

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Simiosys, LLC 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, Simiosys, LLC 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.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Stapleton", written over a white background.

Christopher Stapleton, CEO

simiosys@me.com

www.Simiosys.com

Co-Founder www.VirtualWorldSociety.org

[Profile link](#)

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1760 Dahlgren Road
Middletown MD 21769
(407) 697-0381

Visit Frederick SB 638 Letter of Support 2.20.26.p

Uploaded by: Dave Ziedelis

Position: FAV



February 20, 2026

Chair Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe, and Members of the
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: SB680 – Natural Resources – Maryland Heritage Areas Authority – Funding and Grants

Dear Chair Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe, and Members of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee:

On behalf of Visit Frederick (the Tourism Council of Frederick County), the designated and official destination marketing organization for Frederick County, MD, and being a member of the Board of Directors for the Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area, please accept this letter of support for SB680 – Natural Resources – Maryland Heritage Areas Authority – Funding and Grants.

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 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 - 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.

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.**



I recognize the thoughtful intent behind this legislation and believe 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.

We encourage everyone on the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee to support SB680. Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dave Ziedelis". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "D".

Dave Ziedelis
Executive Director

SB638 Testimony 202602.pdf

Uploaded by: Diane Boettcher

Position: FAV

Testimony: SB 638, Senate Budget & Taxation Committee

HB 654, House Environment and Transportation Committee

Position: FAVORABLE

From: Diane Boettcher, 3635 Epping Forest Way, Owings Mills, MD 21117;
diane.boettcher@gmail.com; 813-629-9334

****Testimony: SB 638 / HB 654****

****Position: Favorable****

I am writing as a member of the Board of Directors of the Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area and as someone who has personally seen the difference this program makes on the ground in our communities.

The Maryland Heritage Areas Authority program is often discussed in terms of numbers—return on investment, grant totals, economic impact—but for me, its value is best understood through places and people. One example that stands out is Ellsworth Cemetery, a historic Black cemetery in Westminster. For many years, the cemetery was largely unknown outside of a small circle of descendants and local historians. Information about who was buried there, why the site mattered, and how it fit into Westminster’s broader history was hard to find.

Through the work supported by the Heritage Area, that has begun to change. Improved interpretation and outreach have made it easier for residents, students, and visitors to learn about Ellsworth Cemetery and the lives of the people buried there. Clearer information, better visibility, and a stronger connection to the surrounding community have transformed the site from an overlooked burial ground into a place of learning and reflection. That kind of impact does not always show up neatly in a budget line, while it matters deeply to the people whose history is being preserved and shared.

SB 638 and HB 654 would allow more of this work to happen. By lifting the current cap on MHAA funding, the State positions itself to better meet the demand for projects that strengthen local economies while also preserving Maryland’s diverse and often under-told history. It is important to note that the Heritage Areas program is not funded through the general fund, but through Program Open Space, as a restricted line that sits outside the Program Open Space formula.

Under current law, up to \$6 million may be allocated statewide, with more than \$5.1 million flowing directly back to communities through grants. Even at this level, the program

delivers a remarkable return, yet demand far exceeds available resources. This year alone, requests totaled more than \$12 million for projects that would support tourism, sustain jobs, and generate state and local tax revenue.

The impact of these investments can be seen across Maryland—in museums, trails, downtowns, parks, and historic sites like Ellsworth Cemetery. These places are not only preserved; they are made accessible and meaningful to the public.

I also appreciate the careful drafting of this legislation. There is no fiscal mandate. The use of “may” and “up to,” rather than “shall,” reflects an understanding of current budget constraints and makes clear that this is an adjustment to allow for future growth, not a demand for immediate new spending.

For all of these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to give favorable consideration to SB 638 and HB 654. These bills strike the right balance between fiscal responsibility and the long-term benefits of investing in Maryland’s heritage and communities.

Lift the cap 2026.pdf

Uploaded by: Elizabeth Comer

Position: FAV



Catoctin Furnace Historical Society, Inc.

12610 Catoctin Furnace Road
Thurmont, Maryland 21788

Name: Elizabeth Anderson Comer, President
Organization: Catoctin Furnace Historical Society, Inc.
Issue: SB0638/HB0654
Position: Favorable
Date: February 14, 2026
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee, February 24, 2026
House Environment and Transportation, February 18, 2026

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Anderson Comer

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Stephen Dill

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Comer

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President Emeritus,

Christopher
Gardiner

I am writing to affirm how important Maryland Heritage Areas Authority (MHAA) grants have been to the Catoctin Furnace Historical Society's (CFHS) contributions to the restoration, preservation and interpretation of DNR properties associated with the Catoctin Furnace Historic Site and the larger Cunningham Falls State Park. MHAA's grant funds to DNR through CFHS have been crucially impactful, helping DNR to advance its mission to lead "the state toward a resilient future by using data, partnerships, and an innovative spirit to improve ecological, social, and economic outcomes for all communities."

CFHS has benefited from more than \$716,000 in MHAA grant funds. While these funds principally represent large project grants, some smaller mini-grants sourced in MHAA block grants are also included in this total. Of those funds, \$403,100 has been devoted directly to three DNR owned facilities: restoration of the DNR-owned ironworker dwelling that we operate as the Museum of the Ironworker, stabilization of the ruins of the Ironmaster's Mansion, interpretive media specific to these DNR-owned properties in Cunningham Falls State Park, and the transfer of the African American cemetery to DNR on December 30, 2025. As you are aware, MHAA grant funds must be matched with non-state funds, so these MHAA funds at Catoctin Furnace have leveraged hundreds of thousands of dollars of funds from private foundations, corporate donors/sponsors, and the federal government, including two NPS Semi quincennial grants. Additionally, considerable in-kind support in the form of donated, goods, services, expertise, and volunteer hours leveraged by the investment of MHAA funds and the resultant investment in DNR properties catalyzed by MHAA funds, is staggering.

Even those MHAA grants that focused on Catoctin Furnace Historic District properties that aren't DNR holdings such as the Collier's Log House, the Carty-Miller House, the F.W. Fraley Store, and the Forgerman's House (all significant properties associated with the historic Furnace community) have been critically impactful. Those MHAA investments have made a positive difference to the State Park, bringing new visitors and awareness to DNR through preservation and programming, resulting in unprecedented numbers of visitors (as evidenced by the DNR furnace parking lot car count which has risen over 3,000 % since the time MHAA-funded projects began in the area).

A significant accomplishment, CFHS acquired the African American cemetery for the enslaved skilled furnace ironworkers in 2025 with your assistance and deeded it to DNR for perpetual

Catoctin Furnace Historical Society, Inc.
240-288-7396

www.catoctinfurnace.org
Where History Changes Lives



Catoctin Furnace Historical Society, Inc.

12610 Catoctin Furnace Road
Thurmont, Maryland 21788

preservation. While the significant land acquisition funds came from another state source, the path that brought us to this point was made possible by MHAA investment in groundbreaking forensic research that has now identified an otherwise long departed and lost descendant community. We received \$100,000 in FY26 MHAA funds to extend the African American Cemetery Interpretive Trail across the newly acquired land, an accessible walk that previously had to stop abruptly at the DNR/private property boundary 360 feet short of the cemetery. Also included in this grant funding is a Cemetery Preservation Plan which will be invaluable to DNR for site management. Descendants linked to enslaved furnace laborers by our MHAA-funded work are visiting from around the globe and have formed a Descendants friends' group that is now planning a second reunion in May 2026. More than heritage tourism economic impact, which is considerable, we are changing lives and cultivating a new, diverse and inclusive generation to be the future stewards of DNR properties like those associated with Catoctin Furnace. Agnes Summers, a Washington County resident and a DNA connected direct descendant of a Catoctin enslaved individual, has confided that her entire life view has been changed because she now knows she is the proud descendant of a skilled ironworker, not "just an unskilled slave."

MHAA grants are a win for Maryland DNR and Catoctin is just one example of this amazing partnership and synergy. Many MHAA-funded projects have benefited State Parks and other DNR programs, either with funding directly to the state entity or via an affiliated nonprofit such as CFHS. It is our understanding that MHAA even paved the way for state employee time to count as matching funds, even though other state sources of match are ineligible. And, as an added bonus for any busy manager, DNR does not have to administer MHAA funding or account for the overall program that supports such critical work for DNR and therefore all Marylanders!

I sincerely hope that you are able to support SB0638/HB0654, which, as I understand, will have no immediate or mandated change to the MHAA budget. However, it will set the stage for continued work on behalf of DNR resources in the future at Catoctin Furnace and around the state. When it subsequently makes fiscal sense for the Governor to allow a greater share of property transfer tax revenues to fund MHAA, the state will be poised to embrace even more impactful, place-based projects, to the benefit of DNR properties to be enjoyed by all Marylanders.

Thank you for your kind attention and consideration. It is very much appreciated.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth A. Comer, President

Catoctin Furnace Historical Society, Inc.

240-288-7396

www.catoctinfurnace.org

Where History Changes Lives

SB0638 Testimony HCWHA.pdf

Uploaded by: Elizabeth Shatto

Position: FAV

Testimony: SB 638, Senate Budget & Taxation Committee
Position: **FAVORABLE**
Date: February 16, 2026
From: Elizabeth Scott Shatto, Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area
22 S. Market Street, Frederick, MD 21701

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**.

22 S. Market Street, Su
Frederick, MD 21701
info@heartofthecivilwa
heartofthecivilwar.org

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

Respectfully submitted,



Elizabeth Scott Shatto, Executive Director



SB 0638 Stories of the Chesapeake Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Gail Owings

Position: FAV



Testimony to the Budget and Taxation Committee

Name: Gail Webb Owings, Executive Director

Organization: Eastern Shore Heritage, Inc. - Stories of the Chesapeake: The Heritage Area of Caroline, Kent, Queen Anne's, and Talbot Counties

Issue: **SB 0638 Natural Resources - Maryland Heritage Areas Authority - Funding and Grants**

Position: Support

The Stories of the Chesapeake Heritage Area enthusiastically supports SB0638 which will allow for lifting the cap on Maryland Heritage Area funding. The proposed legislation sets the stage for future investment in Maryland's rich heritage by lifting the current cap of \$6 million. The legislation does not mandate or guarantee funding but allows for this important program to receive a greater share of Program Open Space funding from the state's transfer tax, if and when it should become available.

Maryland's Heritage Area program is the most successful of its kind in the country and frequently used as a model for other states seeking to build a strong economic base in heritage tourism. Studies have repeatedly found that heritage tourists stay longer, spend more than any other travelers, and that Maryland is a highly desirable heritage tourism destination. This program is a primary tool for developing heritage projects which enhance both the visitor experience and quality of life for our residents.

Since its certification in 2004, the Stories of the Chesapeake Heritage Area has enabled over \$7 million in grants to more than 40 organizations. Recent projects supported include:

- ❖ Expansion of tourism offerings such as the restoration of the Hubbard – Leverage House (one of the few remaining documented safe houses on the Underground Railroad Byway);, the vessels Rosie Parks, Edna Lockwood and Tug Delaware; renovations of the Avalon Theatre, Hardee House, Matapeake Clubhouse; Heritage Walking Tours in Centreville, Kent Narrows, and the Hill; the Chestertown Waterfront Project, and the Sultana Lawrence Wetlands Center.
- ❖ Oral history and research projects for the region's African American heritage including the Rooted Wisdom program, Frederick Douglass exhibits and Chesapeake Heartland Project, interpretation in Chestertown, Kent Narrows, Oxford, Rock Hall and on the Cross Island Trail; documentaries such as Kent Storied Landscapes, and Tilghman Island.
- ❖ Restoration of historic structures that become community-based facilities which also attract the traveling public: Betterton's community-built "Most Precious Blood" 1908 Catholic Church, to become a community center; Centreville's 1936 Kennard School, for community programs and exhibits on African-American heritage; Chestertown's Arts Council Building, Denton's 1901 high school, to house culinary arts programs; Federalsburg's Covey & Williams Garage (circa 1912) as a historical museum, Adkins Arboretum in Ridgely, to expand its natural resources education facility and viewing areas, Sumner Hall-one of the few remaining Grand Army Republic Halls, and the Frederick Douglass Park on the Tuckahoe.
- ❖ Archeology and interpretation at the Hill in Easton.

Unfortunately, many worthy projects have not been able to be funded, stalling projects that are community-building, enhance economic development, expand heritage tourism, support the arts, and ensure our cultural heritage inspires future generations. Please support SB0638.

Heart_of_the_Chesapeake_Letter_of_Support_HB654_SB

Uploaded by: HOLLY GILPIN

Position: FAV



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

SB 638-LOS.pdf

Uploaded by: Jane Cox

Position: FAV



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Jean Russo Ph.D., (Emeritus)

February 20, 2026

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Senate Bill 638 - Natural Resources - Maryland Heritage Areas Authority - Funding and Grants
(Favorable Testimony)

Dear Chair Guzzone:

I am writing to express my support for Senate Bill 638. Although I have served as Executive Director of the Chesapeake Crossroads Heritage Area for just a year, my nearly three decades working in historic preservation for local government allowed me to see firsthand the real-world benefits of this program. I hope to demonstrate why lifting the statutory cap now will ensure that, when fiscal conditions improve, the program can continue building on its compelling record of success. Through its 13 certified heritage areas, the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority (MHAA) has invested in tourism, community revitalization, museum development, historic preservation, and educational programming with tangible local outcomes for nearly three decades, while demonstrating responsible stewardship of public investment.

What is unique about this program, by its very placement under DNR's Program Open Space umbrella, is that we, as heritage areas, help activate the very lands that POS funds help protect and preserve. To spend money just preserving land for the sake of preservation is worthwhile, but when citizens can further appreciate, experience, recreate and learn about our collective history from those lands, State POS dollars are even further enhanced and more fully benefit all Marylanders. I also note that MHAA grant funding is regularly awarded to preserve or make accessible State DNR lands and historic sites. The network of this program within DNRs POS should not be seen "in competition" but rather as part of a sophisticated and symbiotic relationship of responsible and forward-thinking land conservation and management.

Since its inception, the program has awarded more than \$74 million in grants, generating over \$175 million in matching funds — a powerful multiplier that strengthens local economies while preserving Maryland's heritage. In fiscal year 2025 alone, MHAA awarded 88 grants totaling \$5.2 million, leveraging more than \$20 million in non-state matching support and reaching communities across all 23 counties and Baltimore City.

The program has helped develop and make accessible iconic regional sites such as Thomas Point Shoal Lighthouse, the Museum of Historic Annapolis, Historic Londontown & Gardens, and the Annapolis Maritime Museum. MHAA support has been critical in recent years bringing about a renaissance of Carrs Beach in partnership with Blacks of the Chesapeake Foundation, the return of historic skipjacks racing on the western shore through the Skipjack Foundation, and support for a feasibility study to bring back into service the Queenstown Rosenwald School as a community center

and archive by the Severn Improvement Association. Equally important, it supports dozens of smaller and lesser-known historic sites and heritage attractions. Many of these are grassroots, community-driven nonprofits — more than sixty within Chesapeake Crossroads alone — that rely on this support to grow, strengthen organizational capacity, and become places where Maryland’s story can be shared and embraced.

The Maryland Heritage Areas Program funding level is currently capped by regulation at \$6 million. This funding has delivered strong returns, with more than \$5.1 million flowing directly back into Maryland communities each year to support preservation projects, partnerships, historic sites, museums, recreational trails, cultural events, and local conservation and revitalization work. I ask for your support of this bill to ensure the program's long-term success. The economic and community benefits generated by the Heritage Areas Program could be constrained in the coming years if the statutory funding cap is not lifted.

The need is real: In 2025, only about 30 percent of grant requests within my heritage area received funding, despite well-developed, impactful projects that could have leveraged additional community investment and delivered direct tourism benefits to our region. This year, from my heritage area alone, we have 30 organizations requesting more than 1.2 million dollars. The other 12 heritage areas see similar demand- which is why the \$6 million cap is clearly a barrier to building on the success we know these partners can bring forward. This bill is a prudent step to position the MHAA program for long-term vitality while acknowledging today’s fiscal realities. It simply removes an outdated statutory cap, allowing the program to grow with the times if and when resources are available.

Of critical importance is that the legislation carries no fiscal mandate. As per the fiscal note, this bill only AUTHORIZES such an increase but it remains in the hands of the Governor's annual budgetary process to decide if this program is beneficial enough to the State to warrant further support. I believe wholeheartedly that the programs' economic, and cultural benefits are worthy, but this bill merely gives the flexibility in future years to make that decision at a future date. Passing this bill now will not carry a mandate to increase funding- only the authorization to do so under code. Its language is intentionally permissive — using “may” and “up to” rather than “shall” — reflecting awareness of constraints on both the General Fund and Program Open Space funds. It is a necessary legislative adjustment that allows for responsible future growth.

In short, this program works and makes Maryland a better place to live, work, play, and visit. It leverages funding, strengthens local economies, preserves irreplaceable resources, and helps residents and visitors connect with the land and with the past in ways that inspire civic pride and future investment. I respectfully urge a favorable report on this bill and continued support for the Maryland Heritage Areas Program.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



C. Jane Cox
Executive Director,
Chesapeake Crossroads Heritage Area

SB0638 WCCC Support 2-16-26.pdf

Uploaded by: Jim Kercheval

Position: FAV



- Washington County Government
- City of Hagerstown
- Town of Williamsport
- Town of Smithsburg
- Hagerstown Community College
- Washington County Free Library
- The Greater Hagerstown Committee, Inc.
- Hagerstown-Washington Co. Chamber of Commerce
- Visit Hagerstown (Local Convention & Visitor's Bureau)
- CHIEF (Hagerstown-Washington Co. Industrial Foundation)

Washington County Community Coalition Lobbyist: John Favazza, Esquire Mannis Canning & Associates 410.263.7882 jfavazza@maniscanning.com

February 16, 2026

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chairman, Senate Budget & Taxation Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SB0638/HB0654 - Natural Resources - Maryland Heritage Areas Authority - Funding and Grants

Dear Chairman Guzzone and members of the Senate B & T Committee,

In 2005, local leaders established the Washington County Community Coalition (WCCC), a dedicated advocacy group with a dual mission. Our first priority is to collaboratively develop an agenda of priority projects and issues that all partners support, then advocate on behalf of Washington County for our agenda in Annapolis. Secondly, we strive to educate state leaders and policymakers about the unique strengths, activities, and "brand" of our community. Our partners include Washington County Government, City of Hagerstown, Hagerstown Community College, Washington County Free Library, the Towns of Williamsport and Smithsburg, Visit Hagerstown, the Washington County Chamber of Commerce, The Washington County Industrial Foundation (CHIEF), and the Greater Hagerstown Committee.

We are writing to express our strong support for Maryland Senate Bill 0638, which seeks to lift the cap on funding for the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority (MHAA). The Maryland Heritage Area Authority Grant Program provides vital funding to support the preservation of the state's historical, archaeological, natural, and cultural resources. It also fosters economic development through heritage tourism in designated heritage areas. However, over the past three fiscal years, the program has faced a significant funding gap, with an average shortfall of \$8 million between the requested funds and what can be awarded.

Additionally, inflation and the passage of time have diminished the purchasing power of the grants, making it increasingly difficult for organizations to complete their projects effectively. Currently, the program's funding is capped at \$6 million, which is distributed annually to organizations across the state, including Baltimore City and all counties. Given the growing demand for heritage tourism funding, legislation is needed to increase this cap. Specifically, we urge support for the authorization of Program Open Space to transfer funds from \$6 million up to \$12 million annually to the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority Financing Fund.

The economic impact of investing in heritage tourism is undeniable. With increased and targeted funding, we can expand marketing initiatives, enhance visitor services, and develop compelling programs that showcase Maryland's rich and diverse history. This not only fosters local pride but also generates significant revenue, supporting businesses and creating jobs within the tourism sector.

The WCCC fully supports Maryland Senate Bill 0638 and strongly encourages its favorable review and passage. We believe that increasing funding for the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority is a critical step toward preserving our cultural heritage and strengthening the economic vitality of our communities.

Sincerely,


Paul Frey, *Managing Partner for The Washington County Community Coalition*

SB 638_ HB 654 AARCH suppport letter.pdf

Uploaded by: Joan Arnold

Position: FAV



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; 240-446-9086

Board President

African American Resources - Cultural and Heritage Society, Inc

SB0638 Testimony PHG-1.pdf

Uploaded by: Kyla Cools

Position: FAV



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TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE BUDGET AND TAXATION COMMITTEE

Name: Kyla Cools, PhD
Organization: Patapsco Heritage Greenway
Issue: **FAVORABLE SB0638 (HB0654)**

Natural Resources - Maryland Heritage Areas Authority (MHAA) - Funding and Grants

My name is Kyla Cools and I am the heritage program manager for Patapsco Heritage Greenway (PHG), which serves as the heritage area management entity for the Patapsco Valley Heritage Area (PVHA) in Howard and Baltimore County. Our mission is to preserve, protect, interpret and restore the environment, history and culture of the Patapsco River Valley for all. Working with our partners, we have brought increased vitality to heritage tourism activities, enhancing the visitor experience and driving interest in local businesses. MHAA grants, along with PHG's technical assistance and marketing, have supported a wide range of projects in the PVHA, a few of which I'll briefly note.

The Howard County Courthouse exhibit will contribute to the interpretive landscape of the new Capitoline Center, scheduled to open this weekend in Ellicott City's former courthouse. Preservation Maryland's Ellicott City Jail rehabilitation will create a new Center for Climate and Heritage while exploring the site's complex history. Grants to Friends of Patapsco Valley State Park have supported interpretive signage in the Avalon area, the highly successful Mobile Visitor Center, and trail and wayfinding enhancements that improve visitor access to outdoor recreation and historic sites. Ellicott City's Historic District Partnership expanded its Main Street visitor experiences and the Howard County Tourism Council undertook a substantial interior renovation and exhibit overhaul of its Historic Post Office visitor center. Farther from Ellicott City, grants have contributed to Howard County Conservancy's new signage and exhibits, supported unique performances, and ensured the adaptive reuse of historic structures. Smaller grants have brought innovative programming and exhibits to the Elkridge Heritage Society, Elkridge Assembly Rooms, Howard County Center for African American Culture, and Howard County Historical Society.

During the industrial era, one encountered textile, paper and grist mills, iron furnaces, and more dotting the Patapsco River's banks and supporting the growth of Ellicott's Mills and Elk Ridge Landing. Today, our visitors encounter the river flowing past former mill buildings that have been preserved and adaptively reused, experience historic Main Streets in places like Ellicott City, Elkridge, and Catonsville, and hike and bike along the ruins of mill villages fading back into protected green spaces in Patapsco Valley State Park.

Funding through the state heritage area program has been crucial to this effort and is the primary tool used to encourage heritage tourism to Maryland, supporting unique place-making that helps anchor communities and attract visitors. Thank you for your continued leadership and dedication to the people of Maryland.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kyla Cools

Kyla Cools, PhD, Heritage Program Manager

Support SB0638.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Challenger

Position: FAV

January 27, 2026

Senator Paul D. Corderman
403 James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: SB0638

Dear Senator Corderman,

The Beach to Bay Heritage Area (BBHA) is in full support of legislative initiative SB0638, which would lift the cap on Maryland Heritage Area funding. This legislation would allow the Maryland Heritage Areas Program to receive up to \$12 million annually, removing the outdated \$6 million cap currently in place. Importantly, SB0638 does not mandate new funding; it simply provides the flexibility for the program to grow in future years as state revenues permit.

The Maryland Heritage Areas Program is a proven, community-driven economic development tool that supports preservation, tourism, and local revitalization efforts across the state. Statewide, the program generates an impressive \$319.8 million in tax revenues, demonstrating a strong return on investment for Maryland taxpayers.

Within the Beach to Bay Heritage Area, Heritage Area funding has supported transformative projects including the renovation of Henry's Hotel—Ocean City's first boarding house and hotel for African Americans—new exhibits at the historic Germantown Rosenwald School, repairs to Furnace Town's Nassawango Iron Furnace, restoration of the skipjack City of Crisfield, and a collaborative traveling exhibit with the Pocomoke Indian Nation. These five projects alone leveraged more than \$250,000 in funding to strengthen our regional economy and preserve critical heritage assets.

BBHA appreciates your continued support of the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority and respectfully urges favorable consideration of SB0638.

Sincerely,



Lisa Challenger
Executive Director



14 South Main Street
Berlin, MD 21811
BeachesBaysWaterWays.com
info@BeachtoBayHeritage.org
410-251-3163

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Lisa Challenger

PROGRAM SPECIALIST

Andre Nieto Jaime

Organizations in the Beach to Bay Heritage Area Who Have Received Funding Support for Capital and Non-Capital Projects Who Support SB0683

- Berlin Heritage Foundation
- City of Salisbury
- Crisfield Area Chamber of Commerce
- Delmarva Discovery Museum, Pocomoke City
- Furnace Town Foundation, Snow Hill
- German Town School & Heritage Community Center, Berlin
- Henry Hotel Foundation
- Museum of Eastern Shore Culture at Salisbury University
- Ocean City Museum Society, Ocean City
- Pocomoke Indian Nation, Somerset County
- Somerset County Historical Trust
- Town of Snow Hill
- Tyree African Methodist Episcopal Church, Berlin



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David Gaskill

Town Administrator

Mary Bohlen



Senator Paul D. Corderman
403 James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: SB0638

Dear Senator Corderman,

I am writing to express strong support for SB0638, legislation that would lift the current \$6 million cap on Maryland Heritage Areas funding. This bill does not mandate new spending. It simply removes an outdated limitation so the program can grow responsibly in future years as state revenues allow.

The Maryland Heritage Areas Program has consistently proven to be one of the State's most effective economic development tools. It supports locally driven preservation and tourism initiatives that strengthen communities while generating significant economic return. Heritage and cultural visitors stay longer, spend more, and support our small businesses, restaurants, lodging establishments, and Main Streets.

In our region, heritage funding has supported meaningful projects that preserve historic structures, expand educational exhibits, and celebrate diverse cultural stories. These investments leverage private and local dollars, protect important assets, and create experiences that attract visitors year after year.

Despite growing demand and rising costs, grant levels have not increased in decades. The current cap leaves millions of dollars in potential impact unrealized each year and delays high impact projects that are ready to move forward. Lifting the cap will allow the program to meet today's realities and position it for responsible growth in the future.

At a time when communities are seeking sustainable economic development solutions, the Maryland Heritage Areas Program remains a proven, results driven investment. I respectfully urge your support of SB0638.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Ivy Wells
Economic and Community Development Director
Town of Berlin
Board Member: Beach to Bay Heritage Area

MD Heritage Areas Coalition_One Pager_Support of H

Uploaded by: Lucille Walker

Position: FAV



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.

So Md Delegation FAVORABLE_HB654 and SB638.pdf

Uploaded by: Lucille Walker

Position: FAV

EDITH J. PATTERSON
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DELEGATE, DISTRICT 27A

C. T. WILSON
DELEGATE, DISTRICT 28

February 12, 2026

The Honorable Mark Korman
House Environment and Transportation Committee
250 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: House Bill 654 - Natural Resources - Maryland Heritage Areas Authority - Funding and Grants

Dear Chair Korman:

On behalf of the Southern Maryland Delegation of the Maryland General Assembly, we write to express our support for **Senate Bill 638** and **House Bill 654. Natural Resources - Maryland Heritage Areas Authority - Funding and Grants.**

This legislation represents an important step forward for both the State of Maryland and the residents of Southern Maryland by lifting the cap on a unique and highly effective program, the Maryland Heritage Areas. The Maryland Heritage Area Authority is not funded through the general fund. Instead, it is supported through a restricted line within Program Open Space funding and is not part of the Program Open Space formula.

Of the \$6 million allocated statewide for this program, over \$5.1 million is returned directly to our local communities by way of grants that drive economic activity. The program delivers a remarkable return on investment, generating approximately \$7 for every \$1 of state funding.

Demand far exceeds current capacity. This year alone, grant requests total more than \$12 million, reflecting powerful projects and stories that would benefit the State if funded. Even at current levels, the program's impact is visible across Maryland's museums, parks, trails, towns, cities, main streets, forests, waterways, and more.

Southern Maryland has benefited significantly from this program. Examples include the Commemoration to the Enslaved in St. Mary's county, an artwork/history piece/poem that brings the lives of those once forced into enslavement back to us on the very site where an enslaved family's cabin once stood; preservation efforts in Port Tobacco, Maryland's largest international seaport prior to the American Revolution and home to the Ptopaco Tribe for thousands of years; and exhibits at the Calvert Marine Museum that explore the power of water on our peninsula and highlight a way of life that is rapidly disappearing. Each of these projects strengthens local organizations, supports small towns and brings lasting economic value to their communities.

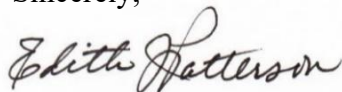
Now, more than ever, Maryland's Heritage Areas must be positioned to grow. Heritage Areas tell stories of courage, of freedom and equality, injustice and struggle, loss and achievement, and the triumph of the human spirit. Heritage Areas reinforce a strong sense of historical character, attract talent, increase tourism revenues, enhance business development, and strengthen local economies.

Importantly, this legislation carries no fiscal mandate. The bill language is intentionally permissive using "may" and "up to" rather than "shall," reflecting an awareness of the budgetary constraints both for the General Fund and Program Open Space funds. This is not a request for immediate additional funding. It is a necessary legislative adjustment to remove an outdated cap and allow for responsible future growth.

The Southern Maryland Delegation recognizes the thoughtful intent behind this legislation and believes its passage will result in meaningful and positive outcomes for our State. This bill strikes the right balance between fiscal responsibility and long-term investment in Maryland's cultural and economic vitality.

For these reasons, the Southern Maryland Delegation respectfully urges favorable consideration and passage of **SB 638 and HB 654**. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require any additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Edith J. Patterson". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Delegate Edith J. Patterson
Chair, Southern Maryland Delegation

Southern MD National Heritage Area_SB0638_FAVORABL

Uploaded by: Lucille Walker

Position: FAV



DestinationSouthernMaryland.com
301.343.2771

Southern Maryland National Heritage Area
P. O. Box 745 | Hughesville, MD 20637

Testimony to:

Senate Budget and Taxation

Name: Lucille W. Walker, Executive Director

Organization: Southern Maryland National Heritage Area

Date: February 20, 2026

Issue: SB 638 Natural Resources Maryland Heritage Areas Authority - Funding and Grants

Position: FAVORABLE

On behalf of the Southern Maryland National Heritage Area, we write to express our strong support for **Senate Bill 638**. This bill (and the cross-file HB654) represents an important step forward for the State of Maryland and for the residents of Southern Maryland by “lifting of the cap” on a very unique program: The Maryland Heritage Area Program. The Maryland Heritage Area Authority is funded through Program Open Space and is not funded through the general fund. The Maryland Heritage Area funding is a restricted line within Program Open Space funding and is not part of the Program Open Space formula.

This legislation 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.

Notably, of the \$6 million allocated statewide for this program, over \$5.1 million goes directly back to our communities by way of grants for economic stimulus. This program has a remarkable return on investment of \$7 in return for every \$1 of state funding, resulting in tangible economic impact. There are far more requests for funding than this program can provide at its current level. This year alone, the grant requests were more than double the funding available, which reflect powerful stories and histories that would benefit our state if funded. That being said, 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.

Listed below are just some of the organizations in our region (Calvert, Charles, St. Mary’s, Southern Prince George’s counties) who have received important grants through this program, and are in support of this “lift the cap” legislation:

- The African American Heritage Society
- The Piscataway Conoy Tribal Council



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301.343.2771

Southern Maryland National Heritage Area
P. O. Box 745 | Hughesville, MD 20637

- Historic St. Mary's City Maryland
- Friends of St. Clement's Island and Museum
- St. Mary's County Museum Division
- Society for the Preservation of Port Tobacco
- Friends of Smallwood State Park
- Friends of Chapman State Park
- Friends of Piney Point Lighthouse and Museum
- Calvert Marine Museum
- Annemarie Sculpture Garden and Art Center
- American Chestnut Land Trust
- Surratt House and Museum
- Accokeek Foundation at Piscataway Park
- Chesapeake Railway Museum
- Bayside Museum
- Historic Sotterley
- Farm Heritage Conservancy
- Maryland Veterans Museum
- Greenwell Foundation at Greenwell State Park
- and *many more* including Historical Societies, Arts Councils, and Educational Institutions.

Now, more than ever, we need Maryland's Heritage Areas to flourish. Heritage areas share stories of courage, of freedom and equality, injustice and struggle, loss and achievement, and the triumph of the human spirit, all while growing the local, regional, and state economies!

The Southern Maryland National Heritage Area recognizes the thoughtful intent behind this legislation and believes its passage will result in meaningful and positive outcomes for our State. **This legislation preserves Maryland's flexibility to invest wisely when resources allow.**

We urge your favorable consideration and passage of SB 638. We thank you for your continued leadership and dedication to the people of Maryland.

Respectfully submitted,

Lift the Cap Testimony-SB.pdf

Uploaded by: Mallory Huard

Position: FAV

Testimony: SB 638, Senate Budget & Taxation Committee

Position: FAVORABLE

From: Mallory Huard, PhD

Secretary, Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area

Assistant Professor, History, Hood College, Frederick, MD

Email: huard@hood.edu

Phone (mobile): 860-389-1082

My name is Mallory Huard, and I am writing in strong support of SB 638. As a U.S. history professor at Hood College in Frederick, MD and an Executive Board Member (Secretary) of the Heart of the Civil War Heritage area, I have witnessed first-hand the importance of the The Maryland Heritage Areas Authority. The 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 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. 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. This money has been and will continue to be important for sharing and developing the many historical sites in the Heart of the Civil War Heritage area.

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. Through MHAA funding, I have witnessed first-hand the impact it can have on local history and infrastructure. One example of a recipient of these funds is the National Civil War Medicine Museum. This is an excellent national museum that has real local draw and charm. My colleagues and I at Hood College have not only brought students to this museum but we have also had students complete internships there as well. These high-impact practices are crucial for students to gain hands-on experience and develop their historical thinking. There are many other local historical sites in Frederick, Washington, and Carroll County that are equally rich as for both education and tourism.

While budgets are obviously a concern in 2026, 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.

I recognize the thoughtful intent behind this legislation and believe 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, I respectfully urge favorable consideration and passage of SB 638 during the current legislative session.

Thank you for your time.

SB0638 - MTC Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Matt Libber

Position: FAV



**MARYLAND
TOURISM
COALITION**

February 20, 2026

The Honorable Guy Guzzone, Chair
Budget and Taxation Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Support for SB0638 – Natural Resources – Maryland Heritage Areas Authority – Funding and Grants

Chair Guzzone and Members of the Committee:

My name is Matt Libber, and I serve as Legislative Committee Chair for the Maryland Tourism Coalition (MTC). MTC is a statewide trade association representing businesses and organizations across every sector of Maryland's tourism industry. Our mission is to support tourism-related enterprises through education, collaboration, and advocacy.

On behalf of our members, I write to express our strong support for **SB0638**, legislation that would increase funding for the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority. This measure is essential to preserving Maryland's rich history while strengthening local tourism economies and driving sustainable economic growth across the state.

Maryland is one of only two states—alongside Pennsylvania - with a statewide heritage area system modeled after the national heritage area program. Our 13 designated heritage areas span every county and Baltimore City, serving as pillars of cultural tourism and regional identity.

Maryland's heritage areas attract visitors from across the country and around the world by showcasing our state's diverse history, natural landscapes, and cultural assets. These visitors support local restaurants, lodging providers, small retailers, museums, and artisans. By investing in heritage areas through enhanced funding and expanded grant capacity, the State not only preserves its historic and cultural resources, but also promotes job creation, small business growth, and community revitalization.

The impact is measurable. Maryland Heritage Areas generate a \$7 return on investment for every \$1 in state funding. Collectively, they contribute \$2.4 billion annually to Maryland's economy, support more than 33,800 full- and part-time jobs, and generate \$319.8 million in economic impact. Despite this proven success, the current Heritage Area Program is capped at \$6 million. HB0654 would raise that cap to \$12 million—allowing the program to meet demonstrated demand and unlock additional economic potential.

Over the past three years alone, an \$8 million gap between grant requests and available funding has left transformative tourism and preservation projects unfunded. These are projects ready to move forward—projects that would enhance visitor experiences, preserve historic assets, and generate local economic activity. The proposed funding increase, sourced from the real estate transfer tax, represents a strategic



reinvestment into communities statewide and will directly strengthen Maryland's cultural tourism destinations.

SB0638 ensures that the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority can continue supporting educational programming, historic preservation, site improvements, and cultural events that attract visitors and extend their stays. Heritage tourists consistently spend more and stay longer than other travelers, making this sector one of the most effective drivers of sustainable tourism revenue.

Increased investment in Maryland's heritage areas is an investment in economic growth, workforce support, and the preservation of the unique assets that define our state. For these reasons, the Maryland Tourism Coalition respectfully urges a favorable report on **SB0638**.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Matthew B. Libber".

Matt Libber
Legislative Chair
Maryland Tourism Coalition
mllibber@mdsoccerplex.org
301-528-1480

sb0638-anacostiatrailandheritagearea-FAVORABLE-2-20-

Uploaded by: Meagan Baco

Position: FAV



February 20, 2026

Budget and Taxation Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**Support for SB0638
Natural Resources - Maryland Heritage Areas Authority - Funding and Grants
FAVORABLE**

Dear Chairman Guzzone,

On behalf of Anacostia Trails Heritage Area, Inc., a nonprofit organization in Prince George's County, I am writing in full support of SB0638 (HB0654) that will allow for lifting the cap on funding for the popular and impactful Maryland Heritage Areas Program.

Each year this grant program receives eligible applications roughly twice the available funds stalling exciting cultural tourism, trail enhancement, and community development projects. Thus, the State is leaving the documented \$7 return for every \$1 of state funding invested in the heritage area program on the table and out of the budget.

This simple legislation would allow the Maryland Heritage Areas Program to receive up to \$12M annually, lifting the current cap of \$6 million. The majority of funds (\$5.1M currently) are awarded as grants, distributing the impact across Maryland via our heritage area system. Moreover, the legislation does not guarantee funding but allows for the program to receive a greater share of Program Open Space funding from the state's transfer tax, if and when it should become available. Our potential applicants will be ready and the impact will be big.

In Prince George's County, where my non-profit organization serves out its mission to protect, preserve, and enhance historic, cultural, and natural assets, our grantees have renovated historic buildings into museums and visitor centers, connected and enhanced trails for commuters and visitors, and promoted our Main Street small businesses.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "meg baco". The signature is written in a cursive, lowercase style.

Meagan Baco, Executive Director, Anacostia Trails Heritage Area, Inc.
4318 Gallatin Street, Hyattsville, MD 20781

SB638_GCCC_fav (2026).pdf

Uploaded by: Mike O'Halloran

Position: FAV



TO: Senate Budget & Taxation Committee
FROM: Garrett County Chamber of Commerce
DATE: February 24, 2026

RE: **SB638 – Natural Resources - Maryland Heritage Areas Authority - Funding and Grants**

The Garrett County Chamber of Commerce is the largest professional business association in Garrett County with over 500 members representing every industry in the region. The Chamber was formed to organize, support, and represent Garrett County’s business community in advancing common interests and promote our county’s hospitality and recreation industries by attracting visitors through comprehensive marketing.

We are writing in support of SB638 – legislation that would increase the amount of funding authorized for transfer from Program Open Space to the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority (MHAA).

Maryland’s Heritage Areas are locally designated and State-certified regions where public and private partners make commitments to preserving historical, cultural and natural resources for sustainable economic development through heritage tourism. The Maryland Heritage Area Program is an outstanding initiative that fosters community-driven projects, which in turn stimulate local economies across Maryland. The return on investment is impressive—every \$1 of state funding generates a \$7 return.

In Garrett County, we are proud to be home to the Mountain Maryland Gateway to the West (MMGTW). As the gateway to the opening and development of America’s western frontier in the late 18th and 19th centuries, Garrett County’s MMGTW is rich with history and tourism. The area includes Braddock’s Road and the Historic National Road – pathways that spurred the building of traveler related businesses including blacksmith shops, taverns and inns. Today, Marylanders and out-of-towners can visit some of our attractions – Pennington Cottage, Friend’s Store, or the Oakland B&O Museum.

Increasing the cap on funding for the MHAA would go a long way in helping our community continue to shine as a destination for historical tourism.

For these reasons, we urge the committee to issue a **FAVORABLE COMMITTEE REPORT** for SB638.



SB0638 PresMD FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Nicholas Redding

Position: FAV



PRESERVATION MARYLAND

February 24, 2026

Hon. Guy Guzzone
Budget and Taxation Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland

RE: SB0638 FAVORABLE

Chairperson Guzzone,

On behalf of the staff and Board of Directors of Preservation Maryland and our thousands of statewide supporters, I thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in **SUPPORT of SB0638** – Natural Resources - Maryland Heritage Areas Authority - Funding and Grants.

Preservation Maryland is the nonprofit, statewide voice for historic preservation that harnesses the power of historic places by revitalizing and reinvesting in communities, advocating, and building the historic trades workforce for the benefit of all Marylanders. (Learn more at: presmd.org)

This bill will authorize the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority to award grants and loans to certain entities for the management of certified heritage areas under certain circumstances. It decreases from 10% to 7% the percentage of Program Open Space funds transferred to the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority Financing Fund that may be used for certain operating expenses. And repeals a provision of law authorizing the distribution of up to \$300,000 to the Maryland Historical Trust. We support this legislation as we believe its passage would positively impact Maryland's heritage areas and our understanding of the state's long and challenging history.

SB0638 is an important piece of legislation, and we urge a favorable report.

Favorable

Sincerely,

Nicholas A. Redding, President & CEO

SB0638 Testimonials.pdf

Uploaded by: Olivia Peterson

Position: FAV



THE COMMISSIONERS OF THURMONT

615 East Main Street
11 Water Street
P.O. Box 17
Thurmont, Maryland 21788
301-271-7313
Fax: 301-271-2155

Testimony: SB 638, Senate Budget & Taxation Committee

HB 654, House Environment and Transportation Committee

Position: FAVORABLE

From: Vickie Grinder, 11 Water Street, Thurmont, MD 21788,
vgrinder@thurmontstaff.com,
(c) 227-267-3554. (o) 301-271-7313 ext. 218

The Maryland Heritage 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 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. Thanks to this funding, Thurmont has been able to add four gateway signs welcoming visitors and residents at all four gateway entrances in our town. We have also benefited from MHA funds for wayfaring signs throughout the town which identify key attractions.

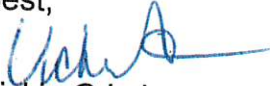
There is no fiscal mandate associated with this legislation. The language is careful to state "may" and "up to" rather than "shall." This is important, as the bill sponsors are aware of current budgetary constraints both for the general fund and for Program Open Space funds. **This is a legislative adjustment to a capped program to allow for future growth and is not a current funding request.**

The town of Thurmont 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 town of Thurmont 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.

Best,



Vickie Grinder
Economic Development Manager
Town of Thurmont

Testimony: SB 638, Senate Budget & Taxation Committee

HB 654, House Environment and Transportation Committee

Position: FAVORABLE

From: Elizabeth Cannon

Secretary, Rose Hill Manor Museum Council

1611 N. Market St.

Frederick, MD 21701

rosehillmuseumcouncil@gmail.com, 301-801-5528

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.

For example, the Rose Hill Manor Museum Council is applying for an MHAA capital grant to restore a historic horse-drawn hearse that is part of the largest public collection of 19th century carriages in the region. The collection will be moving to a newly constructed 6,000 sq. ft. museum in the fall of 2026. Located on the grounds of the manor home of Maryland's first elected governor, Thomas Johnson, the new Rose Hill Carriage Museum will provide state-of-the-art preservation for the collection and an enhanced educational experience. The Museum draws thousands of visitors to Frederick each year, from regional sightseers to organized tours to local families and school groups.

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 Rose Hill Manor Museum Council 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 Rose Hill Manor Museum Council 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.

TOWN OF KEEDYSVILLE, MARYLAND

"Where Northern Thrift and Personality Blend with Southern Charm and Hospitality"

P.O. Box 359
19 South Main Street
Keedysville, MD 21756
301-432-5795
townhall@keedysvillemd.com
www.keedysvillemd.com



Ken Lord, Mayor
Brandon Sweeney, Assistant Mayor
Judy Kerns, Council
Matt Hull, Council
Sarah Baker, Council

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

Position: FAVORABLE

From: Town of Keedysville
19 S Main St, Keedysville, MD 21756
townhall@keedysvillemd.com
301-432-5795

The Maryland Heritage Areas Authority (MHAA) program is a powerful contributor to Maryland's economy and to the vitality of small municipalities like the Town of Keedysville. 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 full economic and community development potential of Maryland's heritage areas in the years ahead. These bills represent an important step forward for the State of Maryland and for the residents of Washington County served by the Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area.

MHAA is not funded through the State's general fund; rather, it is funded through Program Open Space (property transfer tax). MHAA funding is a restricted line within Program Open Space and is not part of the Program Open Space formula.

Current law allows up to \$6 million allocated statewide for this program. More than \$5.1 million goes directly back into communities in the form of grants that stimulate local economies. The return on investment is remarkable — \$7 for every \$1 of State funding. Yet there are far more requests for funding than the program can support at its current level. This year alone, grant requests exceed \$12 million for projects and services that stimulate tourism spending, sustain and create jobs, and generate State and local tax revenue.

The impact of MHAA funding can be clearly seen in towns like Keedysville. The Town is currently utilizing MHAA grant funds to help pay for new, historically accurate slate roof, gutters, and downspouts for the historic Mt. Vernon Reformed Church, located at 64 South Main Street. This Civil War landmark structure is an important part of our community's architectural and cultural heritage. The preservation of this historic church not only safeguards a treasured local asset, but also supports heritage tourism, enhances the character of our Main Street corridor, and contributes to the overall economic vitality of our town. Without MHAA support, projects like this would be significantly more difficult — if not impossible — for small municipalities to undertake.

There is no fiscal mandate associated with this legislation. The language is careful to state “may” and “up to” rather than “shall.” This distinction is important, as the bill sponsors are mindful of current budgetary constraints affecting both the general fund and Program Open Space. This legislation simply adjusts the cap to allow for future growth; it does not constitute a current funding request.

The Town of Keedysville recognizes the thoughtful intent behind this legislation and believes its passage will result in meaningful and positive outcomes for communities across Maryland. These bills strike an appropriate balance between acknowledging present fiscal realities and providing a pathway for future growth, reinforcing Maryland’s commitment to responsible stewardship of its historic and cultural resources.

For these reasons, the Town of Keedysville 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.



DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & ZONING

ZONING | PLAN REVIEW | COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING | LAND PRESERVATION | FOREST CONSERVATION | GIS

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

Position: FAVORABLE

From: Meghan Jenkins
GIS Coordinator/Historic Preservation Planner
Washington County Department of Planning and Zoning
747 Northern Avenue
Hagerstown, MD 21742
Phone: 240-313-2439
Email: mjenkins@washco-md.net

I am writing as a member of the Advisory Council of the Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area, and also as a planner working with the Washington County Historic District Commission.

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 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. 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. The heritage area has provided valuable technical support for our County on numerous occasions regarding historic resources and their protections. Heritage area projects support our local communities and drive tourism and economic development across the entire County which is vital. Our jurisdiction has benefited from this program through a wide range of projects including building preservation

747 Northern Avenue | Hagerstown, MD 21742 | P: 240.313.2430 | F: 240.313.2431 | TDD: 7-1-1

WWW.WASHCO-MD.NET

such as the Saylor House, exhibit creation such as the National Road Museum and plans for future visitor experiences such as those at the Hagerstown Aviation Museum. All of these projects and many more each year provide citizens with valuable cultural experiences, educational programming, and place-based experiences. I look forward to grant applications each year to see the hard work of all the organizations that contribute to the heritage area.

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.**

I recognize 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, I respectfully urge favorable consideration and passage of **SB 638 and HB 654** during the current legislative session.

Testimony: SB 638, Senate Budget & Taxation Committee

HB 654, House Environment and Transportation Committee

Position: FAVORABLE

From:

Tracey McIntire
8907 Crystal Falls Dr.,
Boonsboro MD 21713
mcintiretracey@gmail.com

I am writing as a member of the Advisory Council of the Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area, and also as an employee of the National Museum of Civil War Medicine in Frederick, MD.

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 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. 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. The museum that I work for was the recipient of funding last year, and as a result, we are able to upgrade our exhibits and continue to be the top tourist attraction in Fredrick.

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.**

I recognize the thoughtful intent behind this legislation and believe 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, I respectfully urge favorable consideration and passage of **SB 638** and **HB 654** during the current legislative session.

X

Tracey McIntire
HCWHA Advisory Council



AMERICAN
BATTLEFIELD
TRUST ★ ★ ★

PRESERVE. EDUCATE. INSPIRE.

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

Position: FAVORABLE

From: Luke McKnight, 1030 15th Street NW, Suite 900 East, Washington, DC, 20005,
Lmcknight@battlefields.org, American Battlefield Trust

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. The Trust acquired and preserved with MHAA grant funding the 19.83-acre Jacob Avey Tract at Antietam National Battlefield on the southeast edge of Sharpsburg in 2023. This property made up a portion of Jacob Avey's historic farm and saw significant action during the latter phase of the pivotal 1862 battle.

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 American Battlefield Trust 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 American Battlefield Trust 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.

Testimony: SB 638, Senate Budget & Taxation Committee

HB 654, House Environment and Transportation Committee

Position: FAVORABLE

From: Michael Wicklein, 1702 Mt Washington Ct. Baltimore MD 21209, 443-286-1933

I am writing as a video producer who has worked for payment and also donated services to a number of Heritage Tourism organizations in the State of Maryland. They include the Hagerstown Aviation Museum, the Antietam Illumination Committee, the Boonsboro Museum of History, Historic Ships of Baltimore, the SS John W Brown, the Pride of Baltimore II, The Maryland Center for History and Culture, the Baltimore Museum of Industry and more. These organizations preserve our history and present stories about our heart and soul to our voting citizens and young students.

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 Maryland and for the residents who are served by the Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area and for the Baltimore National Heritage Area, BNHA in Baltimore City and all 13 of our States Heritage Areas.

The significant impact of the current funding levels can be seen in Maryland's museums, parks, trails, towns, cities, main streets, forests, waterways, historic ships and more. I am personally involved in a number of projects as a consultant or video producer that would benefit from this additional funding capability.

Many of the programs these grant funds go to, help bring additional tourists to Maryland and put more "heads in beds", **increasing tax revenues across the state and giving people in the hospitality industry more jobs.** This is a win win for everyone. Making these Bills into law very simply would **bring more cash into our statewide coffers.**

Heritage Tourism brings more people to Maryland to visit, enjoy and learn about the many historic stories that exist in this original colony that signed the Declaration of Independence and fought for freedom from tyranny. We have assets like Ft.McHenry and Antietam that are famous worldwide and attract hundreds of thousands every year to experience the place and feel the bravery and courage of the people who fought here. Let's make the most of who we are and expand on all of the Federal push to celebrate this 250th year of our imperfect freedoms that we have evolved through many historic actions and deeds.

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

With respect

Mike Wicklein

Magic Lantern Productions

Testimony: SB 638, Senate Budget & Taxation Committee

HB 654, House Environment and Transportation Committee

Position: FAVORABLE

From: James M Shriver III jmcsiii@outlook.com 443-289-1957

I am writing as a member of the Board of Directors of the Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area, and also as a resident of Carroll County and active volunteer at the Historical Society of Carroll County and the Union Mills Homestead Foundation. 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 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. 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. Grants have greatly benefited such important historical and cultural sites such as the Carroll County Farm Museum, Historical Society of Carroll County, Union Mills Homestead, Arts Council of Carroll County, City of Westminster, and the Ellsworth Cemetery.

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.**

I recognize 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, I respectfully urge favorable consideration and passage of **SB 638** and **HB 654** during the current legislative session.

SB 638 Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Paul Corderman

Position: FAV

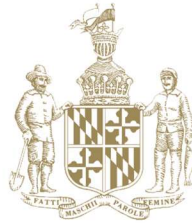
PAUL D. CORDERMAN
Legislative District 2
Frederick and Washington Counties

Budget and Taxation Committee

Subcommittees

Capital Budget

Education, Business and Administration



James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Room 403
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3903 • 301-858-3903
800-492-7122 Ext. 3903
Paul.Corderman@senate.state.md.us

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 24, 2026

Senate Budget & Tax Committee
Chair Guy Guzzone
Vice Chair Jim Rosapepe
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

**Testimony In Support of SB 638 - Natural Resources - Maryland Heritage Areas Authority -
Funding and Grants**

Chair Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe, and Members of the Budget & Tax Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to present SB 638. SB 638 will affirm certified Heritage Areas are powerful engines for local economic development, tourism, and community pride by strengthening the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority's ability to fund planning, management, revitalization, and ensuring these programs remain sustainable and accountable while continuing to preserve the stories and places that define our state.

SB 638 provides practical updates to funding flexibility and oversight, allowing resources to be used more effectively without losing focus on approved management plans. The enhanced transfer authority and clear parameters for operating and debt service expenses will help stabilize projects and maximize the impact of Program Open Space funds.

From Harford County's Vulcan Quarry Trail to Washington County's historic Maryland Theatre, Maryland Heritage Areas have provided critical funding for projects that touch every corner of our state. SB 638 helps give more flexibility and opportunity for these projects to continue positively impacting our shared citizenry.

Thank you for your consideration of this bill, and we respectfully request a favorable report on SB 638.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul D. Corderman".

Senator Paul D. Corderman – District 2, Washington & Frederick Counties

Letter of Support SB 638.pdf

Uploaded by: Paul Frey

Position: FAV

February 16, 2026

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chairman, Senate Budget & Taxation
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SB 638 - Natural Resources - Maryland Heritage Areas Authority - Funding and Grants

Dear Chair Guzzone and Members of the Senate B & T Committee,

I am writing on behalf of the Washington County Chamber of Commerce, representing almost 700 organizations with over 40,000 employees, to express my enthusiastic support for Maryland Senate Bill 638, sponsored by Senator Paul Corderman, which seeks to lift the cap on funding for the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority (MHAA).

Maryland's rich history and diverse cultural heritage are precious assets that deserve our protection and promotion. The MHAA plays a vital role in preserving and interpreting our state's historical landmarks, fostering economic development, and enriching the tourism experience. By allowing more funding the MHAA, we ensure that future generations can appreciate and learn from the stories that shaped our communities. These heritage areas not only celebrate our past but also provide essential resources and support to local economies by attracting visitors and fostering community engagement.

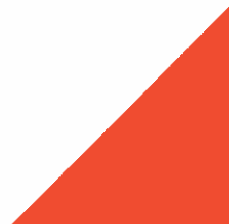
Furthermore, the economic benefits of investing in heritage tourism cannot be overstated. With targeted funding, we can enhance our marketing efforts, improve visitor services, and create captivating programs that highlight the unique stories of Maryland. This, in turn, generates revenue that will benefit local businesses and create jobs in the tourism sector.

The Washington County Chamber of Commerce supports Senate Bill 638 as it lifts the cap on funding of the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority. Your leadership in this matter demonstrates a commitment to preserving our history and strengthening our communities. Thank you for leading this important initiative, and I look forward to seeing the positive impact it will have on our state.

Sincerely,



Paul Frey, IOM
President & CEO



SAMUEL M RILEY TESTIMONY SUPPORTING MHAA CAP INCRE

Uploaded by: Samuel Riley

Position: FAV

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,
sriley@rileymdlaw.com, 410-296-8350.

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

Thurmont.pdf

Uploaded by: Vickie Grinder

Position: FAV



THE COMMISSIONERS OF THURMONT

615 East Main Street
11 Water Street
P.O. Box 17
Thurmont, Maryland 21788
301-271-7313
Fax: 301-271-2155

Testimony: SB 638, Senate Budget & Taxation Committee

HB 654, House Environment and Transportation Committee

Position: FAVORABLE

From: Vickie Grinder, 11 Water Street, Thurmont, MD 21788,
vgrinder@thurmontstaff.com,
(c) 227-267-3554. (o) 301-271-7313 ext. 218

The Maryland Heritage 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 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. Thanks to this funding, Thurmont has been able to add four gateway signs welcoming visitors and residents at all four gateway entrances in our town. We have also benefited from MHA funds for wayfaring signs throughout the town which identify key attractions.


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 town of Thurmont 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 town of Thurmont 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.

Best,



Vickie Grinder
Economic Development Manager
Town of Thurmont