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Environment and Transportation
Committee

Subcommittees

Agriculture and Aquaculture

Energy

Environment

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

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Testimony in Favor of HB0654
Natural Resources – Maryland Heritage Areas Authority – Funding and Grants

Chair Korman, Vice Chair Guyton, and fellow members of the Environment and Transportation Committee:

I respectfully request a favorable report of House Bill 654 to make reforms related to the funding used and directed to the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority – most notably this legislation increases the cap that the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority can receive from \$3 million to \$12 million.

As you heard last session, our Heritage Areas do remarkable work across the State to tell our State's storied and complicated history by investing directly into our local communities and forming critical partnerships. Our 13 Heritage Areas are economic powerhouses: drawing visitors, boosting local businesses, supporting thousands of jobs, and generating over \$300 million in tax revenue that benefits communities across our State.

In authorizing an increased appropriation, this legislation would have the opportunity to grow the significant economic and cultural impact that these Heritage Areas have across the State – and as we head into the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence this year and as we approach the 400th anniversary of Maryland's formation as a Colony in 8 years, I can think of no more significant legislation that we can pass as a General Assembly to double down on our commitment to telling our State's history.

This is a reintroduction of a bill from the last legislative session (House Bill 1327/Senate Bill 980), that passed the Senate and this Committee unanimously and passed the full House by a vote of 137-1 last legislative session; however, it was ultimately vetoed by the Governor.

According the veto letter, the legislation was vetoed because it could jeopardize the State's ability to further conserve land to meet our 40% goal by 2040 – it is important for us to recognize that this legislation raises the cap on how much the Governor is authorized to appropriate from the State's share of Program Open Space – it does not require the Governor to appropriate at that increased level.

This legislation is largely the same as the legislation that we saw and ultimately passed last session; however, there is one slight difference. The legislation we passed last session included some changes to the grants procedures that the Maryland Heritage Area Authority uses. The final legislation last session authorized these grants to be up to \$300,000 and up to 80% of estimated project costs. This provision was removed from the legislation before you as there were similar reforms made in the Departmental introduced by the Department of Planning to remove the funding limitations and instead authorize the requirement of matching funds for such grants.

Once again, I respectfully request a favorable report of House Bill 654 to provide a meaningful authorization for increased funding so our Heritage Areas can expand their remarkable work across our State.