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WRITTEN TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

Name: Aaron Shapiro

Organization: Patapsco Heritage Greenway

Issue: **FAVORABLE HB654/SB638**

Natural Resources - Maryland Heritage Areas Authority - Funding and Grants


February 16, 2026

Patapsco Heritage Greenway supports the underlying principle in HB654 to allow for lifting the cap on Maryland Heritage Area funding. The proposed legislation would allow the Maryland Heritage Areas program to receive up to \$12 million annually, lifting the current cap of \$6 million. The legislation does not guarantee funding, of course, 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.

Patapsco Heritage Greenway is proud to serve as the certified heritage area management entity for the Patapsco Valley Heritage Area 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. In the Patapsco Valley Heritage Area, grants, technical assistance, and marketing have supported projects from, among others, Friends of Patapsco Valley State Park, Howard County Tourism Council (Visit Howard County), Catonsville Rails to Trails, Howard County Conservancy, Community College of Baltimore County, and the Ellicott City Historic District Partnership as well as our local historical societies and in support of our multi-use trails.

The Maryland Heritage Area program supports community driven projects that grow local economies statewide. The return on investment is substantial, with \$7 for every \$1 of state funding. The program supports thousands of jobs and generates millions in state and local tax revenue. Lifting the cap offers the potential for grant levels to rise to where they can be the most impactful in our counties and communities. In these difficult economic times, the Maryland Heritage Areas program is one of the solutions. 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. Patapsco Heritage Greenway urges favorable consideration and passage of HB654, noting that future additional funding would generate substantial economic return while helping meet the needs of our nonprofit and local government partners. Thank you for your continued leadership and dedication to the people of Maryland.

Respectfully Submitted,


Aaron Shapiro, PhD, Executive Director

PATAPSCO HERITAGE GREENWAY is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization working to preserve, protect, interpret, & restore the environment, history, and culture of the Patapsco Valley Heritage Area.