

Testimony: HB 654, House Environment and Transportation 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 HB0654. 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 HB 654 during the current legislative session.

Thank you for your time.