



February 12, 2026

The Honorable Marc Korman, Chair
Environment and Transportation Committee
251 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Support for HB0654 – Natural Resources – Maryland Heritage Areas Authority – Funding and Grants

Chair Korman 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 HB0654, 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.

HB0654 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 HB0654.

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
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