



February 16, 2026

Chair Korman, Vice Chair Guyton, and Members of the  
House Environment and Transportation Committee  
250 Taylor House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

**Re: HB654 – Natural Resources – Maryland Heritage Areas Authority – Funding and Grants**

Dear Chair Korman, Vice Chair Guyton, and Members of the House Environment and  
Transportation 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 House Environment and Transportation Committee to support HB654. Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Sincerely,

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

Dave Ziedelis  
Executive Director