



POSITION STATEMENT

Bill: HB654/SB638 Natural Resources - Maryland Heritage Areas Authority - Funding and Grants

Position: Informational

Bill Hearing Date: February 18, 2026

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Dear Chair Marc Korman,

The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC or “the Commission”) has not voted on this bill. However, staff have prepared an informational statement and some suggested recommendations.

What the Bill Does. This bill authorizes the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority to award grants and loans to certain entities for the management of certified heritage areas under certain circumstances. This bill will also decrease the percentage from 10% to 7% of Program Open Space funds transferred to the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority Financing Fund that may be used for certain operating expenses. It also repeals a provision of law authorizing the distribution of up to \$300,000 to the Maryland Historical Trust. This bill increases the maximum amount of certain funding available to the State that may be transferred to the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority Financing Fund.

This bill alters financing for the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority. The provision the Parks Department is specifically concerned with is the elimination of a set aside for Historic Preservation Non-Capital Grants.

Subject to appropriation by the state legislature, the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority is permitted to issue grants to local government entities, such as the Parks Department, to finance various activities in certified heritage areas. Activities include planning, design, acquisition, development, preservation, restoration, interpretation, marketing, and programming.

Under current law, up to \$3,000,000 can be transferred to the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority to finance these grants. Of that \$3,000,000, there's a set aside of \$300,000 that is intended to be awarded to noncapital historic preservation grants. For grants to local jurisdictions, a one-to-one match is required of the grant recipient.

The Maryland Historic Trust uses this set aside to operate a robust [Historic Preservation Non-Capital Grant Program](#). The Parks Department's cultural resources section uses this grant as an important potential source of funding for cultural resources research and inventory efforts, specifically for archaeology, cemetery work, and historic building studies (that don't involve physical changes to structures).

The Parks Department has received funding through this program in the past. In fact, the Parks Department intends to apply to the non-capital grant program to conduct necessary research and archaeological fieldwork at the new Ednor Soapstone Quarry Park. Very limited funding sources exist for this type of study, and losing the non-capital grant fund would significantly limit the department's options further.