



**MARYLAND
TOURISM
COALITION**

February 20, 2026

Maryland House of Delegates
Kriselda Valderrama, Chair
Economic Matters Committee
230 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Maryland House of Delegates
Delegate Jheanelle Wilkins, Chair
Ways and Means Committee
130 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Support with Amendments - HB0898 – DECADE ACT

Chairs Valderrama, Chair Wilkins and Members of the Committees,
My name is Matt Libber, and I serve as Legislative Committee Chair for the Maryland Tourism Coalition (MTC). The Maryland Tourism Coalition is a statewide trade organization representing businesses and organizations across all sectors of Maryland’s tourism economy — including destination marketing organizations, hotels, attractions, restaurants, cultural institutions, transportation providers, and outdoor recreation entities. Our mission is to support and strengthen Maryland’s tourism industry through education, networking, and advocacy.

I am writing to express concern that **House Bill 0898 (The DECADE Act)**, while addressing important economic and development priorities, does not explicitly include tourism within its framework. Given tourism’s role as one of Maryland’s largest and most geographically diverse economic drivers, its omission represents a significant oversight that should be addressed through amendment.

Tourism Is a Core Economic Development Strategy

Tourism is not a peripheral industry — it is economic development.

In 2024, tourism generated **\$21.2 billion in direct visitor spending** in Maryland. The industry supports more than **193,8450 jobs** across the State and produced **\$2.5 billion in State and local tax revenue**, saving every Maryland household an average of **\$1,051 in taxes annually**. Tourism investment consistently demonstrates measurable returns, with every **\$1 spent on tourism marketing generating approximately \$34 in tax revenue** for State and local governments. Few sectors deliver this level of statewide economic impact with such broad distribution of benefits.

Tourism Benefits Every Region — But Needs Vary by County

One of the strengths of Maryland’s tourism economy is its diversity. The needs and assets of each county and region differ significantly:

- Western Maryland depends heavily on outdoor recreation, heritage tourism, and seasonal visitation.



- The Eastern Shore relies on waterfront access, environmental stewardship, and hospitality infrastructure.
- Central Maryland and urban jurisdictions benefit from cultural tourism, sports tourism, and convention-related travel.
- Southern Maryland continues to grow its agritourism, heritage, and sports tourism footprint.

A one-size-fits-all economic development framework risks overlooking the unique tourism-driven economies that sustain rural counties, small towns, and gateway communities.

If HB 0898 is intended to foster long-term economic growth and competitiveness across Maryland, it should explicitly recognize tourism as an eligible and strategic sector — particularly because tourism serves as a primary economic engine in many rural and coastal jurisdictions where other industries may be limited.

The Risk of Exclusion

Without clear inclusion of tourism in the DECADE Act:

- Tourism infrastructure projects may not qualify for funding or prioritization.
- Destination marketing and visitor economy initiatives may be overlooked.
- Rural counties whose primary economic base is tourism may be unintentionally disadvantaged.
- Statewide economic strategies may fail to capture one of Maryland’s most immediate and scalable revenue-generating sectors.

Tourism infrastructure — including visitor centers, cultural attractions, sports facilities, waterfront improvements, and heritage preservation — often requires the type of strategic investment and financing mechanisms contemplated by the DECADE Act. Explicit recognition ensures equitable access and strategic alignment.

A Practical Amendment

The Maryland Tourism Coalition respectfully urges the Committee to amend HB 0898 to:

1. Explicitly include tourism and the visitor economy as eligible sectors within the Act;
2. Recognize tourism infrastructure and destination marketing as valid economic development tools; and
3. Ensure flexibility that accounts for regional economic diversity across Maryland’s counties.



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Such amendments would not alter the intent of the bill — they would strengthen it by aligning it with one of Maryland’s most proven economic drivers.

Conclusion

Tourism touches every corner of Maryland — from the mountains of Garrett County to the Chesapeake Bay, from Annapolis to Baltimore, and throughout our rural and urban communities alike. It supports small businesses, generates substantial tax revenue, and provides economic opportunities across diverse regions.

As drafted, HB 0898 overlooks this essential sector. By incorporating tourism explicitly into the DECADE Act, the General Assembly can ensure that the legislation reflects the full breadth of Maryland’s economic landscape and delivers equitable benefits statewide.

Thank you for your consideration. I welcome the opportunity to work collaboratively with the Committee to ensure that tourism remains a central and intentional component of Maryland’s long-term economic strategy.

Respectfully submitted,

Matt Libber
Legislative Chair
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