



Maryland DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING

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HEARING DATE: February 13 at 12:00 PM

BILL NO: HB688

COMMITTEE: Appropriations

POSITION: Support

FOR INFORMATION CONTACT: Kristin Fleckenstein (410) 767-7243

TITLE: Maryland Historical Trust – Historical and Cultural Museum Assistance Program
- Funding

BILL ANALYSIS:

HB688 would authorize the Governor to include \$5M annually in the budget to support the Historical and Cultural Museum Assistance Program.

POSITION AND RATIONALE:

The Maryland Historical Trust strongly supports the reinstatement of the Historical and Cultural Museum Assistance Program.

Historical and cultural museums serve important roles both as heritage tourism destinations and repositories of community memory. Ranging from large institutions with nationally significant holdings to smaller, community-based groups, these organizations provide tremendous benefits as community anchors, as places for residents and visitors alike to learn how history and culture shape our present and our future. They operate throughout the state, offering unique educational programming and experiences to Maryland's citizens, and especially to our youth. They create jobs, pay taxes on their sales shop receipts, and enhance the economic vitality of their neighborhoods and towns. Although many of these organizations successfully raise funds from private donors, membership programs and events, more support is necessary to develop new, high-quality programs, enhance engagement with diverse constituents and histories, sustain organizational capacity, and ensure the proper stewardship of the state's cultural treasures.

Maryland currently has no program funding or staff dedicated to supporting this important work. Unlike many other states, Maryland has few directly State-supported museums and heritage sites. Complementary programs, such as the Maryland Heritage Areas Program and programs of the Maryland State Arts Council, support cultural institutions but are limited by their programs' missions and restrictions. Importantly, existing funding programs do not meet the critical needs of museums in – especially – the broader development of educational programs and exhibits, collections care, organizational capacity-building, and operations.

The Museum Assistance Program was always overwhelmingly popular, with demand holding steady at two to four times the available funds. Since the lapse of program funding after FY2011, the needs of Maryland's more than 450 historical and cultural museums have only grown more urgent.

Recognizing the importance of the state's historical and cultural museums in protecting, stewarding and interpreting our shared heritage, MHT has assessed the needs of museums through its statewide preservation planning process in 2014, 2018, and – most recently – in 2023. In 2016, MHT prepared a report at the request of the Maryland General Assembly, to the Chairmen of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee and House Appropriations Committee. In each instance, participants clearly and repeatedly indicated the need to restore dedicated technical assistance and funding for historical and cultural museums, particularly for activities (e.g., collections care) that are not eligible for other grants. This ongoing gap in support limits the ability of Marylanders to engage with their history – a situation made even more pressing as we approach the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution in 2026.

