

Director pushes for film incentives

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ANNAPOLIS — Maryland is losing its homegrown movie industry to other states that give deeper discounts to filmmakers, director Barry Levinson said Tuesday.

Levinson, director of "Diner," "Rain Man" and "Wag the Dog," came to Annapolis to advocate for a revamped film incentive program he said would make Maryland competitive with states like Connecticut and Pennsylvania, which have handed out hundreds of millions of dollars in tax credits in recent years.

When producers decide where to shoot their movies, "Maryland is not in the mix at this particular time, even though we had a great tradi-

tion and a very strong base here," Levinson said.

Levinson, a Baltimore native, helped establish Maryland's base of film-industry professionals in the 1980s with Baltimore-set films including "Diner" and "Tin Men." Baltimore was also home to two long-running TV series, "Homicide: Life on the Street" and "The Wire," that kept crews busy through the 1990s and much of this decade.

But Maryland has struggled to attract major movies or TV series since "The Wire" concluded its run last year. "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button," a \$150 million production that was honored last week with 13 Academy Award nominations, was

originally planned for Baltimore but was rewritten to take place in Louisiana because of the state's generous incentive program.

Maryland currently offers cash rebates to movies and TV shows that shoot in the state, but the program is capped at \$4 million in the current fiscal year, down from nearly \$7 million in previous years.

The legislation pushed by Levinson and other business and film-industry leaders would establish a tax credit similar to what's offered in Pennsylvania, Connecticut and Louisiana. Maryland would hand out credits valued at 28 percent of what a production spends in the state.



Director Barry Levinson, left, and Donald Fry, president of the Greater Baltimore Committee, appear during a news conference advocating film incentives that would make Maryland more competitive with other states, Tuesday in Annapolis.

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