



## **Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association**

To the Ways and Means Committee

January 28, 2020

House Bill 45: Economic Development - Opportunity Zone Incentives - Alteration of the More Jobs for Marylanders and Opportunity Zone Enhancement Programs

### **POSITION: SUPPORT**

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Delegate Carr, Chair Kaiser, Vice Chair Washington, and members of the Ways and Means Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of House Bill 45: Economic Development - Opportunity Zone Incentives - Alteration of the More Jobs for Marylanders and Opportunity Zone Enhancement Programs.

This legislation would alter certain terms relating to eligibility for benefits under the More Jobs for Marylanders and Opportunity Zone Enhancement programs; altering, to taxable years beginning after December 31, 2018, but before January 1, 2022, the time for which enhancements under the Opportunity Zone Enhancement Program are applicable; limiting eligibility for certain Opportunity Zone Enhancement Program benefits to investments in biotechnology and cybersecurity companies established in opportunity zones on or after March 1, 2018; etc.

MRHA's mission is to educate and advocate for the optimal health and wellness of rural communities and their residents. Membership is comprised of health departments, hospitals, community health centers, health professionals, and community members in rural Maryland. Rural Maryland represents almost 80 percent of Maryland's land area and 25% of its population. Of Maryland's 24 counties, 18 are considered rural by the state, and with a population of over 1.6 million they differ greatly from the urban areas in the state.

And while Maryland is one of the richest states, there is great disparity in how wealth is distributed. The greatest portion of wealth resides around the Baltimore/Washington Region; while further away from the I-95 corridor, differences in the social and economic environment are very apparent.

Rural areas rely upon their main streets and small businesses to attract visitors and generate revenue from tourism. Tourism industries in the state employ more than 140,288 full-time employees. While the tourism industry is strong in Maryland, many communities are in need of new investments to spur growth and to retain visitors.

House Bill 45 will have a meaningful impact on the revitalization and growth of small businesses in rural communities by incentivizing private investment in disadvantaged areas.

MHRA thanks you for your consideration.

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