Testimony in Support of
Senate Bill 453 - Economic Development – Maryland Makerspace Initiative Program
Senate Finance Committee
February 15, 2022

The Rural Maryland Council **Supports** SB-453 - Economic Development - Makerspace Initiative Program. The bill intends to encourage growth and development of makerspaces throughout Maryland by establishing the Makerspace Initiative Program in the Maryland Technology Development Corporation. The Corporation will administer the program and partner with the Open Works Center for Advanced Fabrication Technologies in Baltimore City to provide technical assistance to nonprofit entities seeking to establish makerspaces in the State. Additionally, the Corporation will provide financial assistance for the development or expansion of makerspaces. Makerspaces are beneficial to rural communities because they provide resources that many small rural businesses do not have access to and they provide additional trade and technological education to both youth and adults.

Makerspaces provide educational, professional, and developmental opportunities to members of all ages, and are especially helpful for new and small businesses. Some of these makerspaces, such as Openworks in Baltimore City, include access to Wi-Fi, storage lockers, and a personal mailing address. Other facilities include 3D printing, a digital fabrication shop, metal shop, woodworking shop, cut and sew studio, computer lab, and facilities for electronic fabrication. In addition to the facilities and tools, makerspaces may also provide classes for youth, adults, and seniors. School systems and universities can also benefit from makerspaces. For example, Western Maryland Works has collaborated with the Allegany College of Maryland to host the college's Advanced Manufacturing, Industrial Maintenance, and Welding programs. Another example was M4Reactor collaborating with Wor-Wic Community College for a workforce training program that resulted in 77% of the students finding employment. Other Makerspaces provide science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM) based classes for children as young as eight years old.

Makerspaces provide access to facilities that many would otherwise go without. These facilities give opportunities to individuals and small businesses that do not have the ability or the finances to access the resources they need to start or grow their ideas. By allowing many people to use the tools and facilities, it allows for the prices to be more affordable for small business and individuals who have not yet developed the finances to have their own materials. Promoting the growth of these local businesses also results in the production of more American made materials and the creation of more jobs as these businesses expand.

During the pandemic, many makerspaces were required to close their doors to the public as public safety restrictions were implemented. Some of these makerspaces took this opportunity to use their facilities to help their communities by creating and distributing personal protection equipment. M4Reactor, a makerspace in Salisbury, began making ear savers for masks and custom acrylic shields. Open Works of Baltimore City also took the opportunity to use their facilities to make over 28,000 face shields. Due to the positive community impacts of makerspaces, the Rural Maryland Council has provided numerous grants to makerspaces across the State through the Rural Maryland Agricultural Education Rural Development Assistance Fund.

The Rural Maryland Council respectfully asks for your **favorable** support of Senate Bill 453.

The Rural Maryland Council (RMC) is an independent state agency governed by a nonpartisan, 40-member board that consists of inclusive representation from the federal, state, regional, county and municipal governments, as well as the for-profit and nonprofit sectors. We bring together federal, state, county and municipal government officials as well as representatives of the for-profit and nonprofit sectors to identify challenges unique to rural communities and to craft public policy, programmatic or regulatory solutions.

"A Collective Voice for Rural Maryland"