



Susan O'Neill, Chair

Charlotte Davis, Executive Director

Testimony in Support of
House Bill 289 - Maryland Forest Education Fund - Establishment
Environment and Transportation Committee
March 1, 2023

The Rural Maryland Council supports House Bill 289 - Maryland Forest Education Fund - Establishment. This bill establishes the Maryland Forestry Education Fund, a special fund administered by the Maryland Forestry Foundation. In general, the purpose of the fund is to provide small grants and specified training, education, and outreach opportunities for forest landowners, district forestry boards, local governments, and businesses. Beginning in fiscal 2025, the Governor must include in the annual budget bill an appropriation of \$250,000 to the fund. The bill takes effect July 1, 2023.

The Forest Industry grows food, creates hundreds of products, and helps the environment. Nearly 40% of Maryland is forested – the single largest land use in the state that offers tremendous environmental and economic benefits. According to Grow and Fortify's *Value-Added Agriculture in Maryland - An Economic Analysis*, the large scale forestry and wood derivatives contributes nearly \$3.5 billion to the state economy, supporting over 15,000 jobs. Ecologically forests can absorb carbon as they grow and mature, which helps offset fossil fuel emissions. Additionally, they act as natural filters and are seen as excellent water quality buffers, which protect waterways from polluted runoff.

The Rural Maryland Council (RMC) supports the forest industry in Maryland by administering the Maryland Agricultural Education and Rural Development Assistance Fund (MAERDAF). This fund provides grants to rural-serving nonprofit organizations that promote statewide and regional planning, economic and community development, and agricultural and forestry education. In FY2023, RMC awarded \$233,000 in grant funds to 8 organizations whose projects focused on the forest industry. These projects ranged from supporting the purchase of a cable skidder to enhance applied learning to forestry students at Allegany College of Maryland to supporting the Maryland Forestry Foundation and their work with compensating forest landowners for the ecological benefits of practicing sound forest stewardship.

The Council has worked with the Maryland Forestry Foundation over the years and feels that they will be excellent stewards for the Maryland Forestry Education Fund and the provisions laid out HB289. The Rural Maryland Council respectfully requests your favorable support of House Bill 289.

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”