



February 26, 2024

To: Committee Members

From: Shane Garver, Partners for Rural Impact

Subject: Favorable Testimony for Maryland's ENOUGH Act (SB 482 / HB 694)

Dear Committee Members:

Partners for Rural Impact (PRI) writes today to express our strong support for the ENOUGH act. At PRI our ultimate goal is for an America where all kids are successful, regardless of zip code, income, background, or ability. At PRI, our focus is on ensuring that all children in rural places achieve success, particularly working to ensure an additional 1 million rural youth are on a pathway to upward mobility by 2030. Partners for Rural Impact was born out of our place-based partnership in Appalachia, where we've worked for 25 years to create student opportunity and success. Through our place-based work we not only provide academic services and supports but we are also able to provide wraparound supports/services for youth and their families. PRI has seen the power of Promise Neighborhoods (PN) and similar approaches in our rural areas, having successfully run the first rural PN in the nation, we are currently implementing our fourth PN in Letcher County Kentucky.

For far too long generational cycles of poverty and lack of opportunity have held back Maryland children and families from the serenity of the eastern shore to the soaring western mountains. That is why Partners for Rural Impact is proud to support the ENOUGH Act, legislation reimagining how the State of Maryland uplifts children and families and gives those in underserved or under-resourced areas a chance to better their situation.

The ENOUGH Act will fund and assist the development of new neighborhood and regional place-based partnerships while strengthening existing ones through a competitive grant process administered by the Governor's Office for Children. This grant program will support Maryland's children and young people through education opportunities and career readiness. Additionally, the bill will boost families and communities by providing access to good jobs, safe neighborhoods, affordable housing, and quality healthcare, including mental health services.

In our place-based partnerships/programs, similar to those that would be supported by the ENOUGH Act we see the importance of bringing cross-sector partners to the table to ensure all aspects of a youth's life is addressed and all needs of the youth are known. Our experience tells us that reaching these outcomes in rural areas of the state will present specific challenges that place-based approaches are uniquely positioned to meet. This includes skillfully braiding programs and funding streams together, which the approach of the ENOUGH Act promotes. PRI has seen first hand the benefit of taking this approach in our own work. We focus on braiding different federal funding streams together to strengthen our place-based partnerships and solve for a multitude of challenges. For example we have created a talent development pipeline and

helped schools address teacher shortages by braiding AmeriCorps and Full-Service Community Schools into our approach. Each of these programs meets the needs of local youth to move outcomes while providing professional development and employment opportunities that support local residents on a pathway to education careers.

Through place-based initiatives, this legislation will target the root causes of hardship in communities – rural, suburban, and urban – that have disproportionately high numbers of children living in poverty. Place-based initiatives take an evidence-based approach, looking at what children, families, and neighborhoods actually need, and providing concrete social services like education programs, family support, community development, and healthcare for those who need it most, changing the trajectory and outcomes for a child's future college and career success. We have seen the impact of Promise Neighborhoods in our rural region of Kentucky. Our Perry Promise increased 3rd grade reading from 29% in the 2020-2021 school year to 47% in the 2021-2022 school year. Our Knox PN was successful before the pandemic of decreasing chronic absenteeism from 20% in 2017 to 13% in 2019. And our Perry Promise increased their college going rate by 9%, from 65% to 74% in the five year period of the PN grant.

Maryland has a strong track record of supporting education projects, including complementary initiatives like the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. Passed in 2021, the Blueprint increases education funding to accelerate student outcomes and improve the quality of the state's schools. The ENOUGH Act takes this one step further, deploying a whole-of-community approach, designed to give communities the support and resources needed to uplift children and families, and ultimately combat poverty. The strength of the ENOUGH Act is that it will create critical infrastructure for place-based partnerships, expand access to resources to implement this work throughout Maryland, and set a national example for statewide investments in economic mobility. Furthermore, the ENOUGH Act will align and leverage cross-sector community partners for the equitable distribution of services for children and families; promote systems change by funding and advocating for programs and policy changes across the state; and collect, assess, and share data by working with partner organizations and communities to identify the needs within neighborhoods, implement evidence-based solutions, and use data to continuously improve programs.

And notably, this bill is intentional about ensuring that the voices of those closest to the problem are centered in finding a solution. A key part of the ENOUGH Act entails working with community organizations, non-profits, anchor institutions, and other key community members to develop locally-focused, targeted plans of action to address poverty.

For these reasons, we enthusiastically support the ENOUGH Act and believe it will be a national example for states around the country in the fight against child poverty. Maryland is already the proud home to many businesses and has one of the best hospital networks in the nation. The infrastructure exists for them to be successful and when combined with additional outside funding, can be a model for the nation.

We know that a child's ability to access opportunities that allow for social and economic mobility is contingent on them growing up in strong and supportive homes in thriving communities. The ENOUGH Act is the kind of all-hands-on-deck, whole-of-government approach that is critical to

transforming communities and building a future where no child's potential is limited by their zip code. Through the ENOUGH Act, Maryland will invest in local and regional place-based networks that are equity focused, data-driven, and have the capacity to identify the highest needs within the most under-resourced neighborhoods.

By passing this legislation, we will unlock the promise of all Maryland children, placing them on a path to academic success while also strengthening families, fostering community engagement, and instilling civic pride.

Partners for Rural Impact urges the passage of the ENOUGH Act and is grateful for the opportunity to express our strong approval of this bill.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Shane Garver
Vice President of Strategic Impact
Partners for Rural Impact