
TESTIMONY
MID-SHORE REGIONAL COUNCIL

TO: DELEGATE KUMAR P. BARVE
COMMITTEE: HOUSE ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORTATION
FROM: MID-SHORE REGIONAL COUNCIL
SUBJECT: HB 695 RURAL MARYLAND PROSPERITY INVESTMENT FUND –
REVISIONS AND SUNSET REPEAL (RURAL COMMUNITIES
IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 2023)
POSITION: SUPPORT
DATE: FEBRUARY 24, 2023

Dear Mr. Chairman and Committee Members:

The Mid-Shore Regional Council (MSRC) operates as a cooperative regional planning and development agency within Caroline, Dorchester, and Talbot Counties on the Eastern Shore to foster physical, economic, and social development. The MSRC is a United States Department of Commerce – Economic Development Administration (EDA) designated Economic Development District (EDD) – a geographic area distressed by per capita income and/or unemployment rate as defined by the federal government.

About one-quarter of Maryland’s population live in eighteen rural counties, approximately 1.7 million people. Many of these communities, especially in the outlying regions, have higher rates of poverty and unemployment and lower rates of income and educational attainment than their metropolitan and suburban neighbors. Agricultural and resource-based industries continue to support the local economies but are increasingly under threat from outside competition, land development pressure and regulatory changes. Access to health care providers and services presents additional challenges.

By coordinating rural regional cooperation, creating a rich entrepreneurial environment, improving the health care delivery system and supporting key community colleges and nonprofit providers, the quality of life in Rural Maryland has been advanced since 2017 by the Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund (RMPIF) grants supporting over 425 projects. The RMPIF provides funding in five targeted areas which are vitally important to our rural regions:

- Increased **Entrepreneurship** through replenishment of existing revolving loan funds and expanding existing successful training programs.
- Improved **Infrastructure** by increasing telemedicine throughout Maryland and continuing the expansion of broadband infrastructure.
- Enhanced **Regional Planning** by increasing the capacity of existing regional councils.

- Targeted **Community Development** through the Rural Maryland Council and Maryland Agricultural Education and Rural Development Assistance Fund program expanding the agricultural education and business training programs offered by nonprofit providers and community colleges.
- Targeted grants to ensure access to **Health Care** and address rural specific issues related to the implementation of the Affordable Care Act.

*House Bill 695 will ensure the continuation of supporting the target areas highlighted above by removing the sunset funding date of 2030. Additionally, the bill adds the support of **Cooperative Development and Workforce Development** as focus areas under Rural Entrepreneurship and Agricultural Development.*

Maryland's rural communities continue to face a host of difficult issues including an aging population, out-migration of youth, and a deteriorating physical infrastructure. Continuing to fund RMPIF will offer exciting new opportunities for our rural areas and does not duplicate current State efforts. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

The MSRC supports improvements and clarifications as detailed in this bill. The Council looks forward to a favorable report by the House Environment and Transportation Committee on House Bill 695.