

SHEREE SAMPLE-HUGHES  
Legislative District 37A  
Dorchester and Wicomico Counties

—  
SPEAKER PRO TEM  
—

Economic Matters Committee

Rules and Executive  
Nominations Committee



The Maryland House of Delegates  
6 Bladen Street, Room 313  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
410-841-3427 · 301-858-3427  
800-492-7122 Ext. 3427  
Fax 410-841-3780 · 301-858-3780  
Sheree.Sample.Hughes@house.state.md.us

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

TESTIMONY FOR THE SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE

CHAIR GRIFFITH  
VICE CHAIR KLAUSMEIER

HOUSE BILL 695 – RURAL MARYLAND PROSPERITY INVESTMENT FUND –  
ALLOCATION OF GRANTS (RURAL COMMUNITIES IMPROVEMENT ACT OF  
2023)

SUPPORT

March 29, 2023

Good afternoon Chairman Griffith, Vice Chair Klausmeier and members of the Finance Committee. I am here today to ask for your support for HB695 - Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund – Allocation of Grants (Rural Communities Improvement Act Of 2023) as it has been amended. HB695 strikes the funding request, the Executive Committee concurrence with reallocations of grant funds and sunset repeal of the Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund. The legislation passed the House unanimously (133 – 0) on March 20<sup>th</sup>.

This is a formula-driven grant program administered by the Rural Maryland Council – RMC, which is an independent State Agency housed at the Department of Agriculture. RMC is known as the collective voice for rural Maryland. The Council convenes stakeholders to collectively address the needs of rural Maryland communities, develop solutions to meet these needs and then implement the solutions.

The Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund (RMPIF) is distributed through a highly competitive grant program to the State's five Rural Regional Councils, programs, and projects eligible under entrepreneurship, infrastructure, and health care. A portion of funds are retained by the RMC for operational expenses consisting primarily of staff.

RMC is seeking a technical update to the RMPIF which adds Cooperative Development and Workforce Development as focus areas under Rural Entrepreneurship and Agricultural Development. The original RMPIF distribution formula was adopted in 2006, however, it was not until FY2017 that the Council received initial funding for this program.

Demand for RMC programs are high. **In FY2023, RMC received 215 grant applications totaling \$19,130,407, of which 84 grants were awarded totaling \$8,369,629.** These grant recipient projects have had significant outcomes such as improved education outcomes of at risk,

minority children by providing educational summer enrichment programming; supporting general contractor and infrastructure costs for a new 72-unit affordable housing community; expanding broadband internet connections to new homes; and, providing medical transportation, personnel, and services to those in need.

The strength of RMC's impact is dependent on the resources provided to them through the State's operating budget. The RMC and rural non-profit community leverage these funds with local and federal funds to improve the lives of rural Marylanders.

Thank you for your time and I request a favorable report for HB695.