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*Susan O'Neill, Chair*

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Testimony in Support of

House Bill 694 – Governor's Office for Children - Engaging Neighborhoods, Organizations, Unions, Governments, and Households (ENOUGH) Grant Program (ENOUGH Act of 2024)

House Appropriations Committee

February 28, 2024

**The Rural Maryland Council supports House Bill 694 – Governor's Office for Children - Engaging Neighborhoods, Organizations, Unions, Governments, and Households (ENOUGH) Grant Program (ENOUGH Act of 2024).** The ENOUGH Act is a program designed to help communities with a high number of children living in poverty, regardless of whether they are in rural, suburban, or urban areas. The program aims to provide support through place-based interventions that help these communities assess their existing pathways to success, coordinate across different sectors, and address challenges in a strategic and holistic manner. Communities that meet these criteria can apply for competitive grant funding of up to \$10 million per year. The Governor's Office of Children will oversee the program.

House Bill 694 aims to bridge gaps in existing funding streams to support children and families, from early childcare and education to affordable housing, public safety, and civic infrastructure. The bill also looks to neighborhoods in these areas to address their areas of need. For many rural communities, this would be a critical piece of legislation to help bring underserved portions of the state more resources.

Rural communities in Maryland often face significant obstacles that hinder their growth and development, with nine out of ten of the poorest counties in the state being rural. One of the most pressing challenges is the lack of affordable housing, which makes it difficult for individuals and families to find suitable homes. Another issue is the shortage of resources for school systems, which can result in limited educational opportunities for students. Additionally, many rural areas suffer from crumbling infrastructure, including deteriorating roads, bridges, and public facilities.

Despite these challenges, rural Maryland has the potential to thrive if these issues are addressed. By bridging the gap in these areas of need, rural communities can attract more resources, businesses, and organizations, which can in turn improve the quality of life for both current and future residents. Through strategic investments in affordable housing, education, and infrastructure, rural Maryland can become a vibrant and prosperous region that offers a high quality of life for all its residents.

The Rural Maryland Council respectfully requests your favorable support of House Bill 694.

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”