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*Susan O'Neill, Chair*

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Testimony in Support of  
House Bill 837 – More Opportunities for Career-Focused Students Act of 2024  
House Ways & Means Committee  
February 14, 2024

**The Rural Maryland Council supports House Bill 837 – More Opportunities for Career focused Students Act of 2024.** This bill generally requires local school systems to assist high school students in preparing for admission to registered apprenticeship programs in a manner like how they assist students in preparing for admission to postsecondary institutions. The bill takes effect July 1, 2024.

House Bill 837 obligates county boards of education to classify qualifying certifications or apprenticeships as the equivalent of pursuing post-secondary education, which elevates alternative career paths for which there is acute demand in the current labor market. The bill would require schools to pay the exam fees for trade skills and apprenticeship certifications, provided they already do so for college preparatory courses, and would require them to help connect students with vocational apprenticeship and career opportunities, like they do for colleges and universities.

The Rural Maryland Council (RMC) recognizes the value of apprenticeships and the potential impact they have on growing Maryland's economy. Apprenticeships develop important pipelines that help retain youth within communities, while enabling them to acquire important skills that can be utilized in the workforce. The Council has long supported apprenticeship programs, such as the Campaign for Historic Trades in 2019. This program was launched by Preservation Maryland and the National Park Services and teaches students the skills to restore and maintain the historic buildings found in National Parks. Approximately 30 apprentices completed this program and 24 landed permanent jobs within the National Park Service. More recently, in 2022 the RMC supported the Shipwright Apprentice Program at the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum (CBMM) in St. Michaels, Maryland. CBMM's four-year Shipwright Apprentice Program covers 8,000 hours of real work experience, including instruction and training on joinery techniques, ship layout, ship repair, and construction, as well as leadership and management skill development.

The Rural Maryland Council respectfully requests your favorable support of House Bill 837.

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"*