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Susan O'Neill, Chair

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Testimony in Support of
Senate Bill 786 – Task Force on Access to Pharmacy Services and the
Impact of Telepharmacy in Maryland
Senate Finance Committee
March 12, 2024

The Rural Maryland Council supports Senate Bill 786 – Task Force on Access to Pharmacy Services and the Impact of Tele-pharmacy in Maryland. The bill aims to establish the Task Force on Access to Pharmacy Services and the Impact of Telepharmacy in Maryland. This task force will analyze access to pharmacy services and identify barriers to pharmacy services and telepharmacy. The Task Force is required to submit an interim report by May 1, 2025, and a final report by December 1, 2025, of its findings and recommendations on methods to increase access to pharmacy services and the use of telepharmacy in the State to the Governor and certain committees of the General Assembly.

According to a study published by the Center for Disease Control in 2020, rural populations across the United States are both decreasing and growing older. This shift has led to the closure of local businesses in many small rural towns, including pharmacies that dispense medications to older adults. In fact, 16% of rural independent pharmacies had closed during the previous 16 years as of 2018. Community pharmacies play a crucial role by dispensing 90% of medications in the United States. When pharmacies close, it disrupts medication access and negatively affects medication adherence, which can lead to greater disease progression and create a substantial financial burden on the healthcare system.

In October 2023, pharmacist workers went on strike due to poor work conditions and unprecedented closures of major brick and mortar pharmacies such as CVS, Walgreens, and Rite Aid. This strike had a significant impact on the communities where these pharmacies operate, as medications are a crucial component of quality of life.

Telepharmacy is a solution that can help restore access to pharmacy services for patients residing in pharmacy deserts. This practice brings crucial health services back to rural areas and supports local healthcare while complementing neighborhood clinics. With telepharmacy, a pharmacy technician fills prescriptions under the remote supervision of a pharmacist. The pharmacist is also available to counsel patients via a live video feed.

Maryland's rural communities can benefit from access to a pharmacist, leading to increased clinical interventions, improved medication adherence rates, and overall better health outcomes.

The Rural Maryland Council respectfully requests your favorable support of Senate Bill 786.

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.