



## House Bill 461

### *Economic Development - Rural Readiness Program and Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund - Establishment*

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Economic Matters Committee

Date: February 17, 2026

From: Karrington Anderson & Charlotte Fleckenstein

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 461, which establishes the Rural Readiness Program and the Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund, administered by the Rural Maryland Council.

Counties play a critical role in advancing economic development, particularly in rural communities that often face resource constraints when pursuing investment opportunities. HB 461 responds directly to these challenges by creating a structured program to help rural communities build readiness for economic development and compete more effectively for available grant funding.

The Rural Readiness Program will assist eligible applicants, including local governments, in strengthening grant applications, developing viable projects, and preparing communities for future investment. By prioritizing grant awards for entities that complete the program, the bill incentivizes thoughtful planning and ensures that limited resources are directed toward projects with a higher likelihood of success.

HB 461 also establishes the Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund to support collaborative planning and capacity-building initiatives in rural communities. Allowable uses of grant funds, including housing, broadband, infrastructure, workforce development, site readiness, and feasibility studies, reflect the real-world needs counties face when laying the groundwork for sustainable economic growth.

Together, these tools are designed to boost economic development, stimulate investment, and create jobs in Maryland's rural regions. By strengthening local resources and improving readiness for investment, HB 461 will help counties generate long-term economic opportunity.

For these reasons, MACo urges a **FAVORABLE** report on HB 461.