



Maryland Farm Bureau

3358 Davidsonville Road | Davidsonville, MD 21035
410-922-3426 | www.mdfarmbureau.com

February 17, 2026

To: House Economic Matters Committee

From: Maryland Farm Bureau, Inc.

RE: **Support of HB461 Economic Development – Rural Readiness Program and Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund – Establishment**

On behalf of the over 7,000 member families of the Maryland Farm Bureau, I submit written testimony in support of HB461 Economic Development – Rural Readiness Program and Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund – Establishment. This legislation represents a meaningful and strategic investment in the long-term economic vitality of Maryland’s rural communities by strengthening the planning capacity needed to compete for, design, and implement high-impact projects. HB461 establishes the Rural Readiness Program within the Rural Maryland Council to help rural applicants develop competitive project proposals and obtain technical assistance, and it creates a special, nonlapsing Capacity Building Fund to support collaborative planning, infrastructure readiness, site assessment, and cross-sector initiatives that address housing, broadband, transportation, health, economic development, and workforce needs across rural Maryland. These planning functions are essential to rural jurisdictions that often operate with limited tax bases, small staffs, fewer professional planners, and reduced infrastructure resources, all of which HB461 appropriately identifies as barriers to economic competitiveness.

The bill is strongly aligned with the mission and priorities of the Rural Maryland Council, which has long served as a bipartisan, consensus-driven voice for rural stakeholders and enjoys clear support within Maryland’s agricultural community. By directing funding specifically to rural planning and readiness, this legislation invests in the foundational work necessary to unlock federal and state resources, reduce project risk, and create shovel-ready opportunities that benefit the state’s agricultural sector, rural small businesses, and local governments.

HB461 also enhances the effectiveness of existing state programs by giving applicants who complete the Rural Readiness Program priority access to the Maryland Agricultural Education and Rural Development Assistance Fund, the Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund, and the new Capacity Building Fund. This linkage encourages thoughtful, coordinated planning while strengthening accountability and elevating project quality. Rural leaders frequently cite the need for exactly this type of structured assistance, technical support, assessments, toolkits, and project development resources, to ensure that rural jurisdictions are competitive for major grants and able to seize economic development opportunities as they arise.

This bill takes a smart, efficient approach by targeting relatively small but high-impact investments toward planning and capacity building, areas that have historically been



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underfunded yet determine the long-term success of rural economic development efforts. By pairing readiness training with competitive grants of up to \$50,000 for multi-sector and multi-jurisdictional planning, HB461 helps rural communities generate credible feasibility studies, site analyses, and collaborative strategies that otherwise would remain out of reach. These activities are prerequisites for securing private investment, federal infrastructure funds, and public-private partnerships, making this legislation a cost-effective tool for growing Maryland's rural economy.

For these reasons, HB461 is an important step forward in ensuring that rural Maryland is not left behind in statewide economic development. It strengthens planning capacity, encourages regional cooperation, and empowers rural communities to build the foundation necessary for growth, investment, and resilience. I respectfully urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 461.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tyler Hough". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above the typed name.

Tyler Hough
Director of Government Relations

Please contact Tyler Hough, though@marylandfb.org, with any questions