



HOWARD COUNTY OFFICE OF COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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February 12, 2026

Delegate Kriselda Valderrama
Economic Matters Committee
230 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: **TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT of House Bill 461: Economic Development - Rural Readiness Program and Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund**

Dear Chair Valderrama, Vice Chair Charkoudian, and Members of the Economic Matters Committee,

I would like to begin by thanking Senator Hester and Delegate Ziegler for their leadership and continued commitment to strengthening Maryland's rural communities and advancing inclusive economic development across the state.

Maryland's strength is rooted in its diversity of people, geography, and economic assets. Our urban centers, suburban communities, and rural counties are interconnected, and the success of one region reinforces the strength of the entire state. For Maryland to remain competitive and resilient, every county must have the tools and capacity to fully participate in our economy.

House Bill 461 recognizes that a strong statewide economy requires intentional investment in rural readiness and capacity building. By establishing the Rural Readiness Program and the Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund, this legislation creates a practical pathway to help rural communities plan effectively, compete for resources, and implement projects that support long-term economic growth.

Local governments and community organizations in rural areas often face structural challenges that make it harder to access government funding or advance complex economic development initiatives. HB 461 directly addresses these challenges by supporting training, technical assistance, and collaborative planning efforts that strengthen local capacity and readiness.

From Howard County's perspective, we understand that regional and statewide economic success depends on strong partnerships across county lines. When rural counties are positioned to grow, attract investment, and expand workforce opportunities, the benefits extend well beyond their borders.

HB 461 is a thoughtful, strategic investment in inclusive economic development. It ensures that rural communities have the tools they need to contribute to Maryland's shared prosperity.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 461.

Respectfully,



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