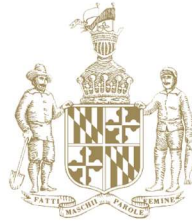


NATALIE ZIEGLER
Legislative District 9A
Howard and Montgomery Counties

Environment and Transportation
Committee



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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in Support of HB 461: Economic Development - Rural Readiness Program and Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund – Establishment

Chair Valderrama, Vice-Chair Charkoudian, and esteemed members of the Economic Matters Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to present House Bill 461, which will establish the Rural Readiness Program and the Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund. This program and fund will equip our rural communities with the economic and logistical support necessary to keep pace with the development of the rest of the state.

Across Maryland, much of our economic development funding is delivered through competitive grants. To qualify, jurisdictions are expected to produce analyses, infrastructure plans, and other qualifying metrics of future success. Urban and suburban localities often have full-time staff and dedicated grant-writers for the purpose of applying for these grants. However, many rural communities and the non-profits that support them are limited in their ability to compete because they lack the administrative capacity to apply. HB 461 would give rural communities the support they need to successfully apply for funding on equal footing with the rest of the state.

In short, the Rural Readiness Program would provide technical assistance to rural jurisdictions so they can develop strategic plans, partnerships, and project proposals that meet the requirements of state, federal, and philanthropic grant programs.

The capacity-building fund provides specialized, individual grant awards up to \$50,000 to assist with preliminary work such as site planning and cross-sector collaboration, before a project can move forward.

The purpose of this legislation is to improve outcomes for our rural population. HB461 does not mandate specific projects or override local decision-making authority. We are simply ensuring that each jurisdiction has a fair opportunity to compete for funding.

For these reasons, I respectfully request a favorable report on HB461.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Natalie Ziegler".

Delegate Natalie Ziegler
Howard & Montgomery Counties, District 9A