



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA)

To the House Economic Matters Committee
Chair: Delegate Kriselda Valderrama
February 13, 2026

House Bill 0461: Economic Development - Rural Readiness Program and Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund - Establishment

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Valderrama, Vice Chair Charkoudian, and members of the Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of House Bill 0461: Economic Development - Rural Readiness Program and Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund - Establishment.

The MRHA supports HB 0461, which creates the Rural Readiness Program in support of economic development for rural communities in Maryland. This bill establishes the Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund, which provides grants for capacity building initiatives in rural communities, including health initiatives.

Economic development initiatives are essential to improving health outcomes, particularly in rural communities. Over 15% of people in rural America live in poverty, and rural unemployment post-COVID-19 pandemic remains high.¹ Strong health care systems that are able to attract and retain their health care workforce are better equipped to provide health services to their communities.¹

Grants that fund rural health initiatives, including hiring and retaining health care workers, can address the health workforce disparity in rural communities while addressing high unemployment rates. Capacity building through the Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund will also encourage rural workers to stay in their communities, combatting the outmigration that rural communities have faced in recent years.¹ Investments in rural communities through grant programs have the opportunity to make meaningful impacts on both the rural health workforce and on rural health outcomes.

MRHA believes this legislation is important to support our rural communities and we urge you to support its passage.

With appreciation,
The Maryland Rural Health Association

1. Carritt N. Health care's role in rural economic development: Addressing health workforce needs. National Rural Health Association. Web site. [https://www.ruralhealth.us/getmedia/cc61bf0a-57c5-43c7-9ce2-d6f5ef695162/NRHA-Policy-Brief-Final-Draft-Healthcare-s-Role-in-Rural-Economic-Development-\(Workforce\).pdf](https://www.ruralhealth.us/getmedia/cc61bf0a-57c5-43c7-9ce2-d6f5ef695162/NRHA-Policy-Brief-Final-Draft-Healthcare-s-Role-in-Rural-Economic-Development-(Workforce).pdf). Updated 2023. Accessed Feb 2, 2026.