



**Testimony
HOUSE BILL 461
Economic Matters Committee
February 17, 2026
Position: FAVORABLE**

Dear Chairperson Valderrama and Members of the Economic Matters Committee:

The Community Development Network of Maryland (CDN) is the voice for Maryland's community development sector and serves nearly 200 member organizations. CDN—focuses on small affordable housing developers, housing counseling agencies and community-based non-profits across the state of Maryland. The mission of CDN is to promote, strengthen and advocate for the community development sector throughout Maryland's urban, suburban and rural communities. CDN envisions a state in which all neighborhoods are thriving and where people of all incomes have abundant opportunities for themselves and their families.

HB 461 - Establishes the Rural Readiness Program administered at the Rural Maryland Council to enhance assistance to rural communities to build their capacity for economic development to provide grants to support collaborative planning and capacity building initiatives that address the needs of rural communities throughout the state of Maryland.

In the past three years, CDN has collaborated with the Rural Maryland Council to build the capacity of organizations for community economic development. Our work produced a rural housing guide and provided direct assistance to community organizations throughout the rural communities in Maryland. Many groups have high aspirations for business, housing and cooperative development but many lack the operating capital needed to carry out projects. Further, many organizations are not able to attend high level training that takes place out of state. This lack of operating capital restricts the power of rural community economic development.

Economic development strategies for rural communities and small cities share many big-picture goals with urban counterparts. Workforce development, business attraction, and quality-of-life initiatives are essential across the board. The best strategies blend existing strengths with emerging opportunities while nodding to the local culture. A comprehensive approach to planning for managing change (growth or decline) can support a cohesive, community-centered framework for meeting the current and evolving needs of rural communities. Tools such as zoning codes, local economic development, climate resilience planning, and community engagement are key elements that form the foundation of sustainable and equitable growth and revitalization.

We urge a favorable report for House Bill 461.

Submitted by Claudia Wilson Randall, Executive Director, Community Development Network

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