

Testimony in Support of Maryland House Bill 461 - Economic Development - Rural Readiness Program and Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund  
by Alice Settle-Raskin

I am honored to testify in support of Maryland House Bill 461.

Raised in Montgomery County by parents of both urban and rural roots, I've been a resident of rural western Howard County, near the four-county Town of Mount Airy, for over 40 years, roughly two-thirds of my lifetime.

I most recently served as a board member of the Mount Airy Main Street Association and ran the farmers' market in downtown Mount Airy for eight years where I promoted our local small-businesses and Maryland's robust regional and local ag-business community.

In addition, my background includes working for two organizations who promoted economic growth through tools provided through grants and technical assistance: Housing Assistance Council based in D.C. who advocates for and builds homes and communities in Rural America; and for Howard County Economic Development Authority, promoting the county and the region as the place to live, work and raise a family.

When traveling through our state, I often take the by-ways, traveling through our small towns. This way, I get to know our state - my state - and not just breeze by highway exits. I look at what and who made these towns click, what the economic drivers are;

and, how these towns once thrived and now have nearly died into obscurity. I look at the reasons why - whether by natural and man-made disasters or by our once vibrant aging population and by the outmigration of youth, our prized next generation.

It's often said that ideas are born out of necessity forming new-found resilience. Ideas spring forth and the community comes together.

HB 461 will help bring back our rural communities by providing better access to funding to help them plan, organize, and prepare to place them in a stronger position to obtain state, federal or private funding. It can make a direct positive impact on these communities through downtown revitalization, workforce development programs, community centers and infrastructure upgrades. It will strengthen our rural communities though increasing their competitiveness and resilience. And, give them the tools to sustain growth by planning for the future. HB 461 presents a strategic investment in our rural capacity, turning ideas into accountable, fundable projects and supporting economic growth across Maryland.

On behalf of the Rural Maryland Council and as a life-long Marylander, I respectfully request your favorable support of HB 461.