



13 Canal Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Cumberland, MD 21502  
WMSR is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit corporation founded in 1986

January 26, 2026

Re: Letter of Support SB0300  
Economic Development – Rural Readiness Program and Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund

To the Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

On behalf of the Western Maryland Scenic Railroad (WMSR), a nonprofit heritage tourism organization serving Allegany County and the greater Appalachian region, I am pleased to express our strong support for the Economic Development – Rural Readiness Program and the establishment of the Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund.

WMSR serves as an economic and cultural anchor in rural Western Maryland, driving tourism, supporting local businesses, and preserving the region's history. Our experience underscores the importance of targeted capacity-building resources that enable rural organizations and communities to plan effectively, collaborate regionally, and pursue sustainable economic development opportunities.

The Rural Readiness Program and the Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund directly address the challenges rural communities face by providing technical assistance, prioritizing prepared entities, and supporting collaborative planning efforts. These initiatives will strengthen local capacity and ensure rural Maryland communities are better positioned to compete for future investment.

During the recent PACE Conference in Annapolis, a board member engaged in rural economic development approached WMSR and expressed a willingness to assist us in strengthening our organizational capacity—highlighting both the growing momentum around rural collaboration and the need for structured, statewide programs such as those proposed in this legislation.

Western Maryland Scenic Railroad respectfully urges a favorable report on this legislation. We appreciate the sponsors' leadership and the Committee's continued commitment to the long-term vitality of rural Maryland.

Sincerely,

*Nikki Shields*

Nikki Shields  
Business Director  
Western Maryland Scenic Railroad