

SB0300 Economic Development - Rural Readiness Prog

Uploaded by: Charlotte Davis

Position: FAV



Testimony in Support of
Senate Bill 300 - Economic Development - Rural Readiness Program and
Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund – Establishment
Finance Committee
February 5, 2026

The Rural Maryland Council **supports Senate Bill 300 – Economic Development – Rural Readiness Program and Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund.** This legislation establishes the Rural Readiness Program within the Rural Maryland Council to assist small towns and small nonprofit organizations that lack the capacity to compete for funding and implement community and economic development projects. The bill also creates a dedicated capacity-building fund to support early planning and predevelopment activities and authorizes the Council to certify program participants and provide priority consideration in Rural Maryland Council grant funding decisions.

Rural communities face unique structural challenges that limit their ability to successfully pursue funding opportunities and carry out development initiatives. These challenges include smaller tax bases; limited access to critical infrastructure such as broadband and transportation; difficulty recruiting and retaining skilled staff to manage projects; fewer social and professional networks to support collaboration; and aging populations coupled with the outmigration of younger residents. Without targeted capacity-building support, these barriers contribute to persistent disparities in healthcare access, educational opportunity, infrastructure investment, and economic growth across rural Maryland.

The Rural Readiness Program is designed to address these challenges by providing early-stage planning support that helps communities become better positioned to compete for state, federal, and philanthropic funding. The program would operate as a pilot reimbursement grant program administered by the Rural Maryland Council, offering grants of up to \$50,000 per community. Through direct Council staff assistance, community assessments, and flexible planning funds, participating communities would be able to develop strategic plans, feasibility studies, market analyses, and other foundational work necessary to advance high-quality projects.

Eligible applicants under SB 300 include tax-exempt organizations, local units of government, state-recognized Tribes, institutions of higher education, and regional planning, economic, or workforce development organizations. State agencies and for-profit entities seeking operational staffing support or proposing non-rural projects are not eligible. By focusing resources on rural communities with demonstrated need, the program ensures that limited funds are directed where they can have the greatest impact.



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Office: 410-841-5772 • Fax: 410-841-5987 • TTY: 800-735-2258
Email: rmc.mda@maryland.gov
Website: www.rural.maryland.gov

Susan O'Neill, Chair

Charlotte Davis, Executive Director

By strengthening local capacity and prioritizing readiness, Senate Bill 300 will improve the quality, competitiveness, and long-term success of rural development projects. This investment will help rural communities plan more effectively, leverage additional funding, and implement initiatives that support economic growth, job creation, and improved quality of life across rural Maryland.

The Rural Maryland Council respectfully requests your favorable support of Senate Bill 300.

SB0300.docx.pdf

Uploaded by: Estelle Yeung

Position: FAV



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA)

To the Senate Finance Committee
Chair: Senator Pamela Beidle
February 1, 2026

Senate Bill 300: Economic Development - Rural Readiness Program and Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund - Establishment

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, and members of the Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 300: Economic Development - Rural Readiness Program and Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund - Establishment.

The MRHA supports SB 300, 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.

SB 300_MDCC_Economic Development_Rural Readiness P

Uploaded by: Grason Wiggins

Position: FAV



Senate Bill 300

Date: February 5, 2026

Committee: Finance

Position: Favorable

Founded in 1968, the Maryland Chamber of Commerce (the Chamber) is the leading voice for business in Maryland. We are a statewide coalition of more than 7,000 members and federated partners, and we work to develop and promote strong public policy that ensures sustained economic growth for Maryland businesses, employees, and families.

Senate Bill 300 (SB 300) establishes the Rural Readiness Program administered by the Rural Maryland Council to help rural communities build capacity for economic development. It would also create the Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund (the Fund) to support planning and collaborative efforts addressing needs in rural areas.

Rural communities play a vital role in Maryland's economy, supporting key industries such as agriculture, manufacturing, logistics, tourism, and small business development. However, many rural jurisdictions face structural challenges that can limit their ability to compete for state and federal economic development resources, attract private investment, and advance large-scale projects.

SB 300 directly addresses these barriers by establishing the Rural Readiness Program within the Rural Maryland Council to help eligible organizations and local governments build the foundational capacity needed to pursue economic development opportunities. By supporting strategic planning and readiness efforts, the program will better position rural communities to develop revenue-generating projects, respond to funding opportunities, and leverage public and private investment.

In addition, the creation of the Fund will provide critical support for planning initiatives that address shared regional needs, including infrastructure, workforce development, housing, and economic resilience. These investments will help rural communities align local priorities with statewide economic goals while fostering stronger partnerships among local governments and businesses.

The Maryland Chamber believes that targeted capacity-building initiatives such as those proposed in SB 300 are essential to creating a more balanced and competitive statewide economy. By equipping rural communities with the tools and resources they need to succeed,

this legislation will benefit not only rural Maryland, but the state's broader business climate and workforce.

For these reasons, the Maryland Chamber of Commerce respectfully requests a **favorable report** on **SB 300**.

SB 300 Worcester County.pdf

Uploaded by: Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio

Position: FAV



Senate Bill 300/House Bill 461

Economic Development – Rural Readiness Program and Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund - Establishment

Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Senate Finance Committee and House Economic Matters Committee

Date: February 3, 2026

From: County Commissioners of Worcester County

The Worcester County Commissioners support Senate Bill 300/House Bill 461 Economic Development- Rural Readiness Program and Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund – Establishment.

Rural communities face unique challenges that can limit their ability to compete for funding. A Rural Readiness Program that could provide local governments and nonprofits with grants to put them in a better position to seek major project funding could make all the difference for small towns struggling to make improvements. Here in rural Worcester County, the assistance a program like this could provide to towns like Snow Hill and Pocomoke would be invaluable, as it would place the jurisdictions in a better position to acquire the funding they need for major projects that would otherwise be beyond their means. A capacity-building program like this one is something that would benefit rural communities throughout the state.

We urge you to provide Senate Bill 300/House Bill 461 with a favorable report. Thank you.

SB0300-FIN_MACo_SUP.pdf

Uploaded by: Karrington Anderson

Position: FAV



Senate Bill 300

Economic Development - Rural Readiness Program and Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund - Establishment

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Finance Committee

Date: February 5, 2026

From: Karrington Anderson

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** SB 300, which establishes the Rural Readiness Program and the Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund, administered by the Rural Maryland Council.

Counties play a critical role in advancing economic development, particularly in rural communities that often face resource constraints when pursuing investment opportunities. SB 300 responds directly to these challenges by creating a structured program to help rural communities build readiness for economic development and compete more effectively for available grant funding.

The Rural Readiness Program will assist eligible applicants, including local governments, in strengthening grant applications, developing viable projects, and preparing communities for future investment. By prioritizing grant awards for entities that complete the program, the bill incentivizes thoughtful planning and ensures that limited resources are directed toward projects with a higher likelihood of success.

SB 300 also establishes the Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund to support collaborative planning and capacity-building initiatives in rural communities. Allowable uses of grant funds, including housing, broadband, infrastructure, workforce development, site readiness, and feasibility studies, reflect the real-world needs counties face when laying the groundwork for sustainable economic growth.

Together, these tools are designed to boost economic development, stimulate investment, and create jobs in Maryland's rural regions. By strengthening local resources and improving readiness for investment, SB 300 will help counties generate long-term economic opportunity.

For these reasons, MACo urges a **FAVORABLE** report on SB 300.

Hester_SB300 Testimony .pdf

Uploaded by: Katie Fry Hester

Position: FAV

KATIE FRY HESTER
Legislative District 9
Howard and Montgomery Counties

Education, Energy, and the
Environment Committee

Chair

Joint Committee on
Cybersecurity, Information Technology,
and Biotechnology



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11 Bladen Street, Room 304
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KatieFry.Hester@senate.maryland.gov

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in Support of SB300 - Economic Development - Rural Readiness Program and Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund - Establishment

February 3, 2026

Chair Beidle, Vice-Chair Hayes, and members of the Finance Committee:

Thank you for your consideration of SB300, which would establish the Rural Readiness Program at the Rural Maryland Council (RMC) to offer targeted capacity-building support to rural communities across Maryland.

Rural communities and the small nonprofits that serve them often lack the capacity to compete for funding, not because of a shortage of ideas or vision, but because limited infrastructure, staffing, and resources constrain their ability to position themselves for growth. Nearly half of Maryland's municipalities, roughly 70 to 80 towns, have populations under 1,000, meaning many local governments operate with minimal staff and administrative capacity.¹ This challenge is compounded by the nonprofit landscape: 66 percent of nonprofits statewide bring in less than \$25,000 annually, leaving little ability to support grant writing, compliance, or early planning work.² As a result, rural communities may have strong ideas and pressing needs, but remain structurally disadvantaged in increasingly complex state and federal funding systems.

SB300 addresses these challenges through proactive measures to support the foundational work that is often necessary to secure state and federal funding. The Rural Readiness Program would:

1. Assist small towns and small nonprofits that lack the capacity to compete for funding through a pilot reimbursement grant program, providing up to \$50,000 per community;
2. Create a capacity-building fund for early planning and predevelopment activities such as strategic plans, building plans, feasibility studies, and market analysis; and
3. Allow the Rural Maryland Council to certify participants, giving them priority in RMC grant funding decisions.

¹ https://planning.maryland.gov/MSDC/Documents/pop_estimate/estimates-post2010/municipal/Table4.pdf

² <https://grants.maryland.gov/Documents/MD-Nonprofits-By-The-Numbers.pdf>

The Rural Readiness Program is flexible and inclusive of a variety of communities who may benefit from its targeted support. Eligible applicants include local governments, tax-exempt organizations (including community foundations), State-recognized Tribes, institutions of higher education, and regional planning, economic, or workforce development organizations.

As we actively work to develop Maryland's statewide economy, it is imperative that our underserved rural communities are not left behind and are instead proactively equipped to participate fully in our growth. SB300 would meet this goal through the establishment of a targeted Rural Readiness Program that helps these communities build their capacities, compete more effectively for funding, and create new opportunities for internal success.

For these reasons, I respectfully request a favorable report on SB300.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Katie Fry Hester".

Senator Katie Fry Hester
Howard and Montgomery Counties

Letter of Support - SB300.pdf

Uploaded by: Michael Mason

Position: FAV



COUNTY COUNCIL OF TALBOT COUNTY

COURT HOUSE
11 N. WASHINGTON STREET
EASTON, MARYLAND 21601-3178
PHONE: 410-770-8001
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www.talbotcountymd.gov

CHUCK F. CALLAHAN, President
PETE LESHER, Vice President

KEASHA N. HAYTHE
LYNN L. MIELKE
DAVE STEPP

February 4, 2026

The Honorable Pam Beidle, Chair
Senate Finance Committee

Re: Senate Bill 300 - Economic Development – Rural Readiness Program and Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund – Establishment

Position: **Support**

Dear Chair Beidle & Committee Members:

On behalf of Talbot County Maryland, we are pleased to express our **support** for Senate Bill 300 – Economic Development – Rural Readiness Program and Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund – Establishment. Talbot County is a rural Eastern Shore county with just over 38,000 residents, more than 600 miles of shoreline, and an economy built on agriculture, maritime industries, healthcare, tourism, financial services, and private sector business. While we are fortunate to have important strengths, we still face structural challenges that are common to rural Maryland communities.

The Rural Readiness Program and Building Fund, administered by the Rural Maryland Council, is a capacity-building tool that counties such as Talbot and our nonprofit partners can utilize for future economic growth. The program is designed to provide technical assistance to eligible rural communities in areas including:

- Assessing local economic development needs and opportunities.
- Developing competitive projects and investment strategies.
- Preparing and managing grant applications and implementation.

Senate Bill 300 sends an important signal that the State recognizes rural Maryland as a vital part of its economic future. Rural Maryland contributes significantly through agriculture, tourism, manufacturing, and healthcare, but often does so with limited local fiscal capacity, making it difficult to compete with our more urban counterparts. State investments that build rural readiness are not simply assistance. They are strategic investments in the long-term competitiveness and resilience of the entire state.

The Talbot County Council respectfully urges a **favorable** report on Senate Bill 300. We look forward to continuing our work with the Rural Maryland Council and our state partners to make full use of the Rural Readiness Program and the Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund to advance economic opportunity for our residents and for rural Maryland as a whole.

Thank you for your kind consideration and attention to this legislation.

Respectfully Submitted,

Chuck F. Callahan
President

SB0300 PresMD FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Nicholas Redding

Position: FAV



PRESERVATION MARYLAND

February 05, 2026

Hon. Pamela Beidle
Finance Committee
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland

RE: SB0300 FAVORABLE

Chairperson Beidle,

On behalf of the staff and Board of Directors of Preservation Maryland and our thousands of statewide supporters, I thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in **SUPPORT of SB0300** – a piece of legislation that will establish the Rural Readiness Program and Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund to be administered by the Rural Maryland Council.

Preservation Maryland is the nonprofit, statewide voice for historic preservation that harnesses the power of historic places by revitalizing and reinvesting in communities, advocating, and building the historic trades workforce for the benefit of all Marylanders. (Learn more at: presmd.org)

This bill will provide assistance to rural communities to enhance their capacity for economic development through the establishment of the Rural Readiness Program. Which will require priority to be given when making certain grants to entities that have completed the Rural Readiness Program. The bill will also establish the Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund to be administered by the Council to provide grants to support collaborative planning and capacity building initiatives. We support this legislation as we believe its passage would address the needs of the rural communities.

SB0300 is an important piece of legislation, and we urge a favorable report.

Favorable

Sincerely,

Nicholas A. Redding, President & CEO

RJR-(Allegany Museum) SB300 Letter of Support (202

Uploaded by: Richard Reinhardt

Position: FAV



3 Pershing Street
Cumberland, Maryland 21502
301.777.7200
Web: AlleganyMuseum.org
Email: info@AlleganyMuseum.org

January 25, 2026

Senate Finance Committee
Miller Senate Office Building, 3 East Wing
11 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401 – 1991

Dear Mr. Chairman:

The Allegany Museum strongly supports SB300: Economic Development - Rural Readiness Program and Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund – Establishment. The establishment of a Rural Readiness Program to provide assistance to rural communities to enhance their capacity for economic development, is a great idea.

Allegany Museum is helping promote Maryland as a destination for heritage tourism. Currently, over 60 percent of our visitors are from out of State. Tourism gives the area an essential economic boost and creates pride in the region's history. One of every ten jobs in Allegany County is now related to our tourist industry. Allegany Museum is also integral to the Cumberland Arts and Entertainment District. We currently are the second poorest county in the state so many of our local visitors are below the poverty level. Over 65% of the children in our county's school are eligible for USDA free school lunch reimbursement. A couple of the schools we host are at the 100% level. We believe heritage tourism can play a vital role in revitalization of our community.

Each year the Museum barely covers operating expenses. We are a volunteer non-profit organization. The proposed legislation would give the Museum some much needed financial support. We appreciate your continued support in empowering local tourism organizations in their quest to make Maryland a top tourist destination.

Sincerely,



Victor Rezendes
Vice President Adm.

RJR-(WMSR) SB300.HB461 Letter of Support Rural Rea

Uploaded by: Richard Reinhardt

Position: FAV



13 Canal Street, 2nd 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

RJR-SB300.HB461-Rural Readiness Program (SUPPORT)(

Uploaded by: Richard Reinhardt

Position: FAV



Senator Pamela Beidle, Chair
Senator Antonio Hayes, Vice Chair
Senate Finance Committee
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: Senate Bill 300/House Bill 461: Economic Development - Rural Readiness Program and Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund – Establishment – SUPPORT

February 5, 2026

Dear Chairwoman Beidle and Finance Committee Members:

On behalf of the various nonprofit organizations and municipalities located in rural Maryland that I represent in Annapolis, I write this letter to proudly support Senate Bill 300/ HB461; entitled: *Economic Development - Rural Readiness Program and Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund – Establishment*.

As written, Senate Bill 300/ HB461 proposes to establish the Rural Readiness Program. Administered by the Rural Maryland Council, this new program will provide much-needed assistance to increase economic viability and growth throughout our State's rural communities. Participation and completion in this program will give eligible applicants priority consideration to various established funding sources through the Maryland Agricultural Education and Rural Development Assistance Fund and the Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund.

If enacted, SB300/HB461 would also establish the Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund that will offer grants to support planning and building initiatives to advance efforts in addressing the needs of these rural communities, such as housing, energy, workforce, infrastructure, and workforce development.

This legislation is critical for several key reasons. Supporting Senate Bill 300 is crucial for several reasons:

- (1) The Rural Readiness Program aims to improve the economic development capabilities of rural communities, which is essential for their long-term growth and prosperity.*
- (2) The program ensures that rural communities receive the necessary support and resources to address their specific economic development needs.*
- (3) The Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund encourages collaborative planning and initiatives that address unique challenges and opportunities within rural communities.*

(4) By providing grants and assistance, the program helps small businesses and entrepreneurs in rural areas to thrive and contribute to the local economy.

(5) The establishment of the program promotes rural entrepreneurship, which is a key strategy for economic development in rural communities.

Supporting these initiatives not only benefits the communities directly but also contributes to the overall economic health and stability of Maryland.

It is for these reasons, we proudly support the passage of this legislation and respectfully requests a **FAVORABLE** report on Senate Bill 300/ House Bill 461 by this committee.

Sincerely,

Richard J. Reinhardt, II

Richard J. Reinhardt, II
Partner
Percy Public Affairs

List of Clients who Benefit of the Passage of SB300/HB461

Allegany Museum
Allegany Co. Historical Society
City of Cumberland
City of Frostburg
Western Maryland Scenic Railroad
YMCA of the Chesapeake

SB300 Worcester EcoDev Tourism.pdf

Uploaded by: Ryan Snow

Position: FAV



Office of Tourism & Economic Development
107 West Green Street, Snow Hill, MD 21863
(410) 632-3112 • www.MarylandsCoast.org

February 3, 2026

The Honorable Kriselda Valderrama
Chair, Economic Matters Committee
230 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

The Honorable Pamela G. Beidle
Chair, Finance Committee
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chair Valderrama, Chair Beidle, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Worcester County Department of Economic Development and Tourism, we write to express our favorable support for **SB 300/HB 461 – Rural Readiness Program and Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund**.

Worcester County supports SB 300 because it directly addresses one of the most significant challenges facing rural jurisdictions: limited local capacity to compete for and effectively deploy state and federal economic development resources. The establishment of the Rural Readiness Program, administered by the Rural Maryland Council, will provide rural communities with technical assistance and structured support to strengthen grant readiness, project development, and long-term planning efforts.

In addition, the creation of the Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund will allow eligible entities, including local governments and regional economic development organizations, to access competitive planning grants to advance critical initiatives in areas such as housing, workforce development, broadband, infrastructure, and community revitalization. These planning and capacity-building investments are essential precursors to successful capital projects and private-sector investment. Rural counties have a difficult time competing for funds with our urban counterparts. Our successes look different. For example, in rural counties, a 10–20 job gain can move the needle the same way a 200-job project does in urban Maryland.

From Worcester County's perspective, SB 300 will improve coordination between state and local partners, encourage multi-jurisdictional collaboration, and ensure that rural communities are better positioned to leverage future funding opportunities. The program's focus on readiness, accountability, and project sustainability aligns closely with how economic development actually occurs in rural Maryland.



Office of Tourism & Economic Development
107 West Green Street, Snow Hill, MD 21863
(410) 632-3112 • www.MarylandsCoast.org

For these reasons, Worcester County respectfully requests a **favorable report on SB 300/HB 461** Thank you for your leadership and for your continued commitment to strengthening Maryland's rural communities. Thank you for the opportunity to share our perspective.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Melanie Pursel".

Melanie Pursel,
Director of Tourism & Economic Development

SB300 (RMC).pdf

Uploaded by: William Reid

Position: FAV

February 5, 2026

Committees: Finance Committee

Testimony: Senate Bill (SB) 300 - Economic Development - Rural Readiness Program and Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund – Establishment

Position: Support

Good afternoon, Madam Chair, and members of the Finance Committee. My name is Dr. William Reid and on behalf of the Rural Maryland Council and Frederick County Progressives, I support SB300-Economic Development - Rural Readiness Program and Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund

SB300 is important because it addresses a challenge many rural communities face—not a lack of ideas or motivation, but a lack of capacity. Too often, rural communities are expected to compete for grants and economic development opportunities without the planning resources, staffing, or technical support needed to succeed. This bill recognizes that readiness matters.

SB300 establishes the **Rural Readiness Program**, administered by the Rural Maryland Council, to help rural communities build the foundational skills they need before pursuing major funding opportunities. In practice, this means providing technical assistance, training, and planning support so communities can assess their strengths and gaps, improve governance and financial readiness, and identify realistic priorities. Communities that complete the program demonstrate that they are prepared to responsibly manage public funds and carry projects forward. Prioritizing these communities for certain grants is a smart, accountable use of taxpayer dollars.

The bill also establishes the **Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund**, which works hand in hand with the Rural Readiness Program. While the Readiness Program focuses on preparation, the Capacity Building Fund provides the resources needed to move from planning to action. These grants support collaborative planning, regional partnerships, organizational strengthening, and coordination across local governments and nonprofits. Importantly, this fund does not focus on one-off projects; it invests in rural communities' long-term ability to compete for and sustain economic development.

Together, these programs create a pipeline. First, communities build readiness. Then, they receive targeted funding to strengthen capacity and implement plans.

This approach reduces the risk of stalled projects, unused grant funds, and missed opportunities. It also levels the playing field so smaller or under-resourced rural communities are not left behind simply because they lack staff or grant-writing expertise.

SB300 is not about lowering standards—it is about raising the likelihood of success. By ensuring communities are prepared before receiving funding, the State is making a prudent investment in stronger outcomes, better stewardship of public resources, and more durable economic growth across rural Maryland.

On behalf of the Rural Maryland Council and Frederick County Progressives, I request your favorable support of SB300. This bill reflects a thoughtful, practical approach to rural economic development—one that recognizes that readiness and capacity are essential foundations for long-term success.

SB 300_Commerce_INFO.pdf

Uploaded by: Jennifer LaHatte

Position: INFO



Wes Moore | Governor
Aruna Miller | Lt. Governor
Harry Coker, Jr. | Secretary of Commerce

DATE: February 5, 2026
BILL NO: Senate Bill 300
BILL TITLE: Economic Development - Rural Readiness Program and Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund - Establishment
COMMITTEE: Senate Finance
POSITION: INFORMATIONAL ONLY

This bill establishes the Rural Readiness Program administered by the Rural Maryland Council (RMC) to assist small towns and small nonprofits that lack the capacity to compete for funding. SB 300 also establishes a capacity-building fund for early planning and predevelopment activities such as strategic plans, building plans, feasibility studies, and market analysis, and lastly allows the Rural Maryland Council to certify participants, giving them priority in RMC grant funding decisions. The bill also establishes the Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund to provide grants to support capacity building initiatives and enables the Fund to accept appropriations for said grants but does not mandate a certain appropriation or source of funds for implementation. The Maryland Department of Commerce (Commerce) provides the following information should it be helpful to the Committee in consideration of this legislation.

Rural communities face unique challenges that limit their ability to compete for funding and implement projects, including smaller tax bases and limited access to infrastructure such as broadband and transportation; difficulty recruiting and retaining skilled staff to manage projects; fewer social and professional networks to support collaboration, and aging populations and outmigration of younger residents. Without targeted capacity-building support, these challenges lead to ongoing disparities in healthcare, education, infrastructure, and economic opportunity. When RMC assists communities in obtaining grant and state funding, they have found that this can sometimes be challenging for many reasons, one of which being that they are often applying and inquiring about multiple funding opportunities, with little understanding of how to maximize their efforts and streamline the process. This bill seeks to alleviate this issue.

The Moore Miller Administration recognizes these challenges and has implemented a variety of efforts to attempt to mitigate them. One of these efforts was the creation of a new position within Commerce, the Director of Rural Economic Development, which was filled in the summer of 2024. The Rural Readiness Program will complement the work being done by the Director of Rural Economic Development by directing additional resources toward capacity building and expanding economic opportunities in rural communities.

INFORMATIONAL.SB300.HB461.LauraBogley.MDRTL.pdf

Uploaded by: Laura Bogley

Position: INFO



INFORMATIONAL - Request for Amendment

SB300/HB461 –Economic Development - Rural Readiness Program and Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund - Establishment

Laura Bogley-Knickman, JD
Executive Director, Maryland Right to Life

We Oppose Taxpayer Funding for Elective Abortions

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Maryland Right to Life and our 200,000 followers across the state, we respectfully **seek your amendment** on SB300/HB461 to exclude public grant funding to businesses and organizations that promote or profit from elective abortions. This bill allows public grant funding to be used for Health purposes. While improvements to rural healthcare, and in particular prenatal and obstetrical care is critically necessary for rural areas of our state, elective abortion is not healthcare, is never medically necessary and competes against women's access to legitimate reproductive care.

The majority of the public opposes taxpayer funding for abortion and prefers programs that protect the lives of both mothers and children. Any legislation to promote economic development should prioritize public investments in the health of both mothers and children, but exclude public grants to subsidize the abortion industry, its facilities, providers or workforce.

Telabortion Puts Women's Lives at Risk

Public policy has failed to keep pace with the abortion industry's rapid deployment of chemical abortion drugs, which now make up nearly three-quarters of all abortions. Chemical abortion drugs are harmful to women's health, almost always result in the death of a fetal human being, and are often misused due to the reckless deregulation of these drugs by the Food and Drug Administration and State of Maryland. The state of Maryland has a duty to ensure that abortion is safe and must intervene on behalf of women and girls by adopting a protocol and standard of medical care for the use of chemical abortion drugs.

We are opposed to any policies that would expand funding for telabortion, abortion by pharmacist, and the remote distribution of dangerous chemical abortion drugs. Reducing the credentials of those who may perform or provide abortions, including reimbursing pharmacists who distribute abortion drugs, is increasing the number of preborn children being killed, subjecting more women to injury and death, and straining emergency room providers who must provide emergency interventions for botched abortions as abortion drug providers who routinely deny their customers care for abortion complications.

Catastrophic complications can occur through telabortion, and emergency obstetrical care may not be readily available in rural areas of our state. Chemical abortion is at least 4 times more dangerous than even surgical abortion. At least 11% of women using abortion drugs experience serious complications that require hospitalization. When women in rural or other remote areas are able to purchase these lethal drugs remotely and without being under an obstetrician's care, abortion drug manufacturers and providers offer no aid when women experience complications. This creates an artificial demand on Emergency Room personnel to deal with elective abortion complications has increased 500%, increasing medical scarcity and threatening the conscience rights of medical providers.

Remote access to lethal abortion drugs also increases the risk of abortion coercion and forced ingestion of abortion drugs against a woman's consent are increasing nationwide as men can now easily order and be prescribed these lethal drugs without sufficient oversight. This bill would put Maryland women at greater risk of harm.

While we oppose all abortion, we strongly recommend that the state of Maryland enact reasonable regulations to protect the health and safety of girls and women by adopting the previous FDA Risk Evaluation and Mitigation Strategies (REMS) safeguards that required that the distribution and use of mifepristone and misoprostol, the drugs commonly used in chemical abortions, be under the supervision of a licensed physician because of the drugs' potential for serious complications including, but not limited to, uterine hemorrhage, viral infections, pelvic inflammatory disease, loss of fertility and death.

The Public Opposes Funding for Abortions

A [2026 Marist poll](#) showed that 54% of Americans, both "pro-life" and "pro-choice" oppose the use of tax dollars to pay for a woman's abortion. Maryland taxpayers believe that the state only uses public funds for abortions that are deemed "medically necessary" in order to save the life or health of the mother. Taxpayers do not support the use of public funds for elective abortions, which make up the vast majority of abortions committed in Maryland.

Without amendment, this bill could allow additional public funds to be used as corporate welfare for the abortion industry and abortion drug manufacturers, further subsidizing these for-profit businesses and their non-profit partners. This is in direct conflict with the will of 88% of people who prefer funding for programs that protect the lives of both mothers and children.

Subsidizing Corporate Abortion

Abortion is big business in Maryland. In just one year, the abortion industry received at least **\$40 million** in taxpayer funding. Maryland taxpayers subsidize the abortion industry through direct Maryland Medicaid reimbursements to abortion providers, through various **state grants** and contracts, and through pass-through funding in various state programs. Health insurance carriers are required to provide reproductive health coverage to participate with the Maryland Health Choice program. Public departments and programs subsidizing abortion and abortion providers include the Maryland State Department of Education, Maryland Department of Health, Abortion Care and Reproductive Clinical Health Program, Maryland Family Planning Program, Maternal and Child Health Bureau, the Children's Cabinet, Maryland Council on School Based Health Centers, Maryland Assembly for the Advancement of School Based Health, Community Health Resource Commission, Maryland Children's Health Program (MCHP) and Maryland Stem Cell Research Fund.

Public Funding through Maryland Medicaid - The *Maryland Medical Assistance Program* and the *Maryland Children's Health Program* (MCHP) are the two primary programs used for publicly funded reimbursements to abortion providers in Maryland.

According to the Maryland Department of Legislative Services in their *Analysis of the FY2025 Maryland Executive Budget*, Maryland taxpayers, through the Maryland Medical Assistance Program, are being forced to pay for *elective* abortions. In 2023, taxpayers spent at least \$7.9 million for 12,727 abortions, with **less than 11 of those abortions due to rape, incest or to save the life of the mother.**

Medical Assistance Expenditures on Abortion Language attached to the Medicaid budget since 1979 authorized the use of State funds to pay for abortions under specific circumstances. Specifically, a physician or surgeon was required to certify that, based on his or her professional opinion, the procedure is medically necessary. Similar language was attached to the appropriation for **MCHP** since its advent in fiscal 1999. However, this language was repealed in 2022.

Maryland Abortion Care Access Act- In 2022, the Maryland General Assembly repealed this final safeguard for women by enacting the Abortion Care Access Act, making it legal for non-physicians (including any certified pharmacist) to provide abortions and forcing taxpayers to pay to train abortion providers. The Act established the Abortion Clinical Care Training Program in the Maryland Department of Health (the Department), renamed as the Abortion and Reproductive Clinical Health Program, and established the Abortion Care Clinical Training Program Fund. In 2025, the State gave at least \$13.6 million to the abortion industry to train abortion providers.

Funding restrictions are constitutional

The Supreme Court of the United States, in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health* (2022), overturned *Roe v. Wade* (1973) and held that there is no right to abortion found in the Constitution of the United States. As early as 1980 the Supreme Court affirmed in *Harris v. McRae*, that *Roe* had created a limitation on government, not a government funding entitlement. The Court ruled that the government may distinguish between abortion and other procedures in funding decisions -- noting that "*no other procedure involves the purposeful termination of a potential life*", and held that there is "*no limitation on the authority of a State to make a value judgment favoring childbirth over abortion, and to implement that judgment by the allocation of public funds.*"

The Maryland General Assembly must put patient safety before abortion politics and profits. For these reasons, we respectfully urge you to amend this bill to preserve its otherwise commendable purposes, by excluding funding for abortion providers or promoters including the remote distribution of dangerous abortion drugs through pharmacies or other non-physicians. Women in rural areas and across the state deserve access to legitimate reproductive healthcare which should be the priority of public investments and grants.

We appeal to you to prioritize the state's interest in human life, healthy pregnancy outcomes and to restore to all people, born and preborn, our natural and Constitutional rights to life, liberty, freedom of speech and religion.