



## **Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association**

To the Ways and Means Committee

March 4, 2021

House Bill 1144 Economic Development – Western Maryland Economic Future Investment Board and Fund – Establishment

### **POSITION: SUPPORT**

Chair Kaiser, Vice Chair Washington, Delegate Buckel, and members of the Ways and Means Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of House Bill 1144 Economic Development – Western Maryland Economic Future Investment Board and Fund – Establishment.

MRHA supports this legislation that establishes the Western Maryland Economic Future Investment Fund as a special, non-lapsing fund to provide grant funding to capital infrastructure projects and business development projects that improve the economic conditions in the region.

Rural Maryland faces many unique challenges compared to the rest of the state, including deteriorating infrastructure, economical and broadband issues. This fund would provide greatly needed initiatives and solutions to address infrastructure and economic situations across rural Maryland.

MRHA's mission is to educate and advocate for the optimal health and wellness of rural communities and their residents. Membership is comprised of health departments, hospitals, community health centers, health professionals, and community members in rural Maryland.

Rural Maryland represents almost 80 percent of Maryland's land area and 25% of its population. Of Maryland's 24 counties, 18 are considered rural by the state, and with a population of over 1.6 million they differ greatly from the urban areas in the state.

And while Maryland is one of the richest states, there is great disparity in how wealth is distributed. The greatest portion of wealth resides around the Baltimore/Washington Region; while further away from the I-95 corridor, differences in the social and economic environment are very apparent.

MHRA believes this legislation is important to support our rural communities and we thank you for your consideration.

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