



Susan O'Neill, Chair

Charlotte Davis, Executive Director

Testimony in Support of
House Bill 596 – Health and Human Services Transportation Improvement Act of 2023
Health and Government Operations Committee
Tuesday, February 28, 2023

The Rural Maryland Council supports House Bill 596 – Health and Human Services Transportation Improvement Act of 2023. This bill will establish a Rural Nonemergency Medical Transportation Pilot Program for hospitals to coordinate transportation provided by a nonprofit organization to or from medical services for eligible individuals; repeal a certain cap on the amount of grants that may be awarded by the Maryland Transit Administration under the Maryland Senior Rides Program; require the Governor to provide at least \$1,000,000 annually to support the Rural Nonemergency Medical Transportation Program in the State's budget beginning in 2025; and other items generally relating to transportation for health and human services.

Routinely the Rural Maryland Council (RMC) receives requests to fund health-related transportation projects through the Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund grant program. Examples of these request include the purchase of vehicles to take patients to dialysis; support the development of computer dispatch software to aid in non-emergency medical transportation; and support salaries and wages of staff that intake and coordinate health transportation needs. The rise in demand for these requests led RMC to partner with the Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland this past fall to lead three Transportation Health Care Roundtable meetings between healthcare and transportation providers to determine how non-emergency health transportation can be improved in the State.

The research and findings generated from these roundtables showed that there is a lack of coordination between the transportation and healthcare sectors, a lack of knowledge where to go for transportation services, and a lack of resources. Additional findings from the roundtables show that there is a need to develop a rural transit model that provides on demand services (versus fixed route), smaller vehicles, and take a more regional approach to support the program. Cross-jurisdictional travel for health care services is often a requirement in rural areas.

The Council strongly believes that the provisions included in House Bill 596 will help alleviate the challenges found in the non-emergency Health and Human Services Transportation sector. The Rural Maryland Council respectfully requests your favorable support of House Bill 596.

The Rural Maryland Council (RMC) is an independent state agency governed by a nonpartisan, 40-member board that consists of inclusive representation from the federal, state, regional, county, and municipal governments, as well as the for-profit and nonprofit sectors. We bring together federal, state, county, and municipal government officials as well as representatives of the for-profit and nonprofit sectors to identify challenges unique to rural communities and to craft public policy, programmatic or regulatory solutions.