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GOVERNOR MARTIN O'MALLEY SIGNS LEGISLATION ADDRESSING RURAL DISPARITIES

Annapolis, MD – On May 15, 2014, Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley signed into law House Bill 1024/Senate Bill 137 – Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund – Revisions and Extension of Termination Date. This legislation is a step to addressing disparities in the State's rural areas. This legislation extends the fund's authorization from 2020 to 2030, increases the capacity of the five regional councils and expands programming to include health care.

The Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund (RMPIF) was authorized by the General Assembly in 2006. The primary goal of the Fund is to provide targeted investments to various regional, nonprofit and educational entities in order to bring Rural Maryland's standards of living up to statewide averages. The Governor is authorized, but not required, to include an appropriation in the annual Budget Bill for fiscal years 2008 through 2020.

About one-quarter of Maryland's population live in eighteen rural counties. Many of these communities, especially in the outlying regions, have higher rates of poverty and unemployment and lower rates of income and educational attainment than their metropolitan and suburban neighbors. Agricultural and resource-based industries continue to support the local economies but are increasingly under threat from outside competition, land development pressure and regulatory changes. Access to health care providers and services presents additional challenges.

The Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund can offer important targeted investment to promote economic prosperity in Maryland's traditionally disadvantaged and underserved rural communities. By sustaining efforts to promote rural regional cooperation, facilitating entrepreneurial activities and supporting key community colleges and nonprofit providers, the quality of life in Rural Maryland can be advanced over the next several years.

The Rural Maryland Council is an independent state agency and Maryland's federally designated State Rural Development Council under the United States Department of Agriculture's National Rural Development Partnership. Our mission is to 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 develop and implement policy solutions.

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