



# Rural Maryland Council 2015 Legislative Review

The 2015 Maryland General Assembly Legislative Session began with high expectations and fresh faces, but ultimately ended with tension over the budget. With the recent gubernatorial election, there were a large number of new freshmen legislators and a new administration. During this time, the Rural Maryland Council (RMC) worked to advance its legislative priorities and increase our visibility with legislators. New activities included hosting a welcome breakfast for new rural legislators and a Rural Maryland Day in Annapolis.

For Fiscal Year 2016, the Governor introduced and the Maryland General Assembly passed an Operating Budget of \$40.5 Billion. As adopted, the projected structural gap between revenues and spending is reduced by approximately 69%, well above the 50% target recommendation by the Spending Affordability Committee. Overall, the budget continues to constrain spending growth; in total, the budget grows 1.5%. RMC Budget Priorities included:

- RMC Operating Expenses are level funded at \$167,000.
- The Maryland Agricultural Education and Rural Development Assistance Fund (MAERDAF) is Level Funded at \$167,000
- The five Regional Councils are level funded at \$150,000 each.
- The Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO) was targeted for cuts by the Maryland Department of Budget and Management and by the Maryland Department of Legislative Services, but was ultimately level funded at \$2,875,000. Several additional years of mandated appropriations were added into statute through the Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act.

We thank the Governor and the Maryland General Assembly for their support.

While the Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund was not included in the Governor's budget as introduced, we advocated for a supplemental budget request of \$1,915,000. We want to thank the legislators that supported our request:

#### Delegates:

Christopher Adams (R-District 37B)  
Carl Anderton, Jr. (R-District 38B)  
Steve Arentz (R-District 36)  
Wendell Beitzel (R-District 1A)  
Mary Beth Carozza (R-District 38C)  
Andrew Cassilly (R-District 35B)  
Jefferson Ghrist (R-District 36)

Michael Jackson (D-District 27B)  
Jay Jacobs (R-District 36)  
Sally Jameson (D-District 28)  
Johnny Mautz (R-District 37B)  
Charles Otto (R-District 38A)  
Sheree Sample-Hughes (D-District 37A)  
Brett Wilson (R-District 2)

#### Senators:

Joan Carter Conway (D-District 43)  
Addie Eckardt (R-District 37)  
George Edwards (R-District 1)  
Steve Hershey (R-District 36)  
Roger Manno (D-District 19)

Jim Mathias (D-District 38)  
Thomas Mac Middleton (D-District 28)  
Wayne Norman (R-District 35)  
Andrew Serafini (R-District 2)  
Steve Waugh (R-District 29)

The Maryland General Assembly passed a proposal to expand the scope of practice of nurse practitioners. The RMC submitted joint testimony with the Maryland Rural Health Association in support of House Bill 999 - Certified Nurse Practitioners - Authority to Practice. This legislation repeals the prohibition against a certified nurse practitioner practicing in the State without an approved attestation and instead requires an applicant for initial certification as a nurse practitioner to identify on his or her application to Board of Nursing a licensed physician or certified nurse practitioner mentor who will consult and collaborate with the applicant.

RMC supported proposals that promoted viable agriculture, forestry and rural communities. We advocated for funding for important land preservation programs. The budget committees approved funding for:

- Program Open Space-Stateside-\$21,602,750
- Program Open Space-Local-\$30,134,900
- Rural Legacy-9,370,500
- Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation-17,044,500

We supported expanding tax credits for community investment and locally generated renewable energy. The Executive Director testified in support of HB 636/SB 154 Renewable Portfolio Standard – Thermal Energy. This legislation created a 2% thermal energy tier which would include woody biomass, geothermal heating and cooling systems, and animal manure systems.

During the 2015 Legislative Session, we supported several economic development proposals. The Executive Director testified in support of SB 196/HB 1089 – Rural Economic Development Program and One Maryland Tax Credit. This measure would have established the Rural Economic Development Program, under which a qualified business in rural counties is eligible for 10 years of property, income, and sales tax benefits. We also supported SB 507 – Maryland Strong Manufacturing Development Act. This bill provided for local personal and real property tax credits, an income tax credit and an exemption of State income taxes of the qualified wages and salaries paid to employees employed by new or expanding manufacturing entities within a Manufacturing Development Zone. The RMC worked to expand the bill to include wood manufacturing. With the implementation of the Augustine Commission recommendations, all economic development proposals were deferred.

To protect local roadway infrastructure, funding for local governments were included in an early supplemental budget submitted by the Governor and approved by the Legislature. The Maryland municipalities will receive \$19 million in Fiscal Year 2016; county governments will receive \$4 million.

Other major issues addressed during the 2015 Legislative Session included: a two year moratorium on fracking, changes to the stormwater management fee and enhanced nutrient management. Next year's Presidential primary will be moved to the last Tuesday in April (April 26, 2016) and the speed limit on Western Maryland highways can now be raised from 65 to 70 miles per hour.

*The Rural Maryland Council (RMC), an independent state agency, brings together rural leaders, government officials at all levels, and the representatives of the non-profit and for-profit sectors to develop public policy solutions to the challenges unique to rural Maryland. Ultimately, our mission is to improve the quality of life while preserving the cultural heritage of Maryland's rural communities.*

**Rural Maryland Council**  
**rural.maryland.gov**  
**50 Harry S. Truman Parkway**  
**Annapolis, Maryland 21401**  
**(410) 841-5772**  
**rmc.mda@maryland.gov**