



RMC Legislative Committee Meeting Minutes

Date: February 24, 2020

Time: 2:00 pm to 3:00 pm

Type: Conference Call

Participants: Janice Palmer, Steve McHenry, Matt Tefteau, Charlotte Davis, Bill Valentine, John Hartline, Don Mulrine, Kathy Shirk, Chris Benzing, Bill Christopher; Susanna Zilberfarb, Kimberly Kravotil, Susan O'Neil, Debbie Bowden, Josh Bolinger, Kelly Dudeck, Ryan Snow, Scott Warner, Kurt Fuchs, Senator Addie Eckardt, Lucille Walker, Cassie Shirk, Greg Padghm, Janice Palmer, Wilbur Levengood, Alice Settle-Raskin, Amanda Clevenger; Megan D'Arcy.

Welcome and Introductions

The meeting convened at 2:03pm. The Rural Maryland Co-Chair, Lindsay Thompson was not available for the meeting and RMC's Executive Director, Charlotte Davis was elected to run the meeting. Charlotte welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked for participants names to record.

Review of February 10, 2020 Meeting Minutes

Charlotte asked participants if there were any additions or corrections to the 2/10 minutes. There were no comments. A motion of approval was requested, Janice Palmer approved and Senator Eckardt seconded. All were in favor. Minutes adopted.

Legislative Tracking

The following two bills were brought to the attention of the Committee:

HB1539 - Grant Applications and Reporting - Uniform Forms and Requirements. This bill has the potential to impact RMC's grant process as it creates a Council to uniform the grant process, which would require grantees to use the federal process. This could especially impact the smaller MAERDAF grant (grant awards up to \$40k) for the following reasons:

1. Requires require a grantee to have at least 3 years of experience prior to applying. This would leave behind the startups and early innovators.
2. Small grantees would be required to have federal audits done every year at significant cost, usually around \$30,000.
3. The federal grant process is not an easy one to navigate and would most likely discourage small volunteer run nonprofits from applying

Lucille Walker and Charlotte met with the house sponsor last week to learn more information and any flexibility with amendments. Lucille offered a dollar amount as an exemption (less than \$250k) and that was denied. Lucille & Charlotte heard from several grantees from across the state that a statewide grant uniform process would gut a lot of the smaller programs. Senator Eckardt suggested an amendment for a centralized place and changing it to a study rather than implementation as we need to know the impact this would have on small programs. The Committee decided to submit a Letter of Information with a request for a study.

HB1534- Department of Agriculture - Urban Agriculture Grant Program. The purpose of this bill is twofold. First, establish the *Urban Agriculture Grant Program* in the Department of Agriculture. The aim of this program is to increase the viability of urban farming and improve access to urban grown foods. Secondly, establish *the Urban Agriculture Grant Fund* with the purpose to distribute the grant money to urban agricultural producers. MDA would administer the program. The grant currently requests 400k through Program Open Space. The Committee asked for an amendment to strike current funding source. Charlotte met with the sponsor, Delegate Melissa Wells. The purpose for the bill is to promote agriculture in general but focusing on more education and community development. The Program is focused in Baltimore City and the Committee stated that they would like to see it piloted there but then modeled in other urban areas of the State. Cassie Shirk would like to follow-up with Charlotte one-on-one as she as discussed, this bill with the Secretary of Agriculture.

Bill Tracker: Charlotte referred to the bill tracker that was sent as an attachment to review. The additional bills discussed were the following: *SB0985/HB1488, Certified Local Farm Enterprise Program and Certified Local Food Aggregation Grant Fund-Establishment* This bill establishes the Certified Local Farm Enterprise Program and Office in the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) to encourage State agencies and four-year public universities to achieve an overall goal of purchasing 20% of food from certified local farm enterprises. Additionally, the bill establishes a Certified Local Farm Enterprise Food Aggregation Grant Fund within the Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO) to establish and operate food aggregation, storage, processing, and distribution sites across the State through grants and near-equity investments. Steve McHenry provided additional information about the bill as it creates two MDA positions and MARBIDCO would be providing the funds for these positions. Farm Bureau and MARBIDCO support the bill, MDA is monitoring it. There is a fiscal note that states a mandatory \$500k, which is an error. John Hartline stated that the bill would help towards their Regional Agricultural Center in southern Maryland. The Committee decided to submit a letter of support.

SB0540/HB0999, Member - Regulated Cooperatives – Establishment. Matt Tefteau from Choptank Electric was on the call and able to answer committee members questions. Charlotte recommended a Letter of Information that supports the rural electric cooperative to become broadband providers but would like the bill to include language that authorizes or enables the cooperative to provide last-mile broadband services, a network planning and thoughtful development of the broadband deployment model, and include a five-year deployment plan of last mile residential services including timelines and project goals to the legislative committees. The committee agreed with the LOI.

Other

Charlotte asked participants if there were other items to discuss. The bill pertaining to a funding source for community development organizations around the state was briefly discussed. Senator Eckardt stated that they have not worked through the bill yet. SB986/HB 1487-Public Schools-Agriculture Education and Grant Programs. The committee submitted a letter of support for this bill. Charlotte informed the committee that there is discussion of amending this into the Kirwan legislation under career technology education.

Adjourn

Charlotte requested an adjournment of the meeting at 2:58pm and a motion was made, seconded. Adjournment was unanimous.

Next Meeting: Monday, March 9, 2020, 2pm-3pm, Conference Call