



2021 Rural Maryland Council Legislative Review

The Maryland General Assembly adjourned Sine Die on April 12, 2021 after final passage of the Fiscal Year 2022 Operating Budget and bills concerning police reform, tenant evictions, COVID relief, broadband, telehealth, and telework. The Rural Maryland Council (RMC) and their associated grant programs - the Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund (RMPIF) and the Maryland Agricultural Education and the Rural Development Assistance Fund (MAERDAF) were fully funded and are designated to receive \$6,118,485 in Fiscal Year 2022. We thank Governor Larry Hogan, Senate President Bill Ferguson, and House Speaker Adrienne Jones for their support.

Operation, Capital Budget & Relief Act Highlights

With assistance through the American Rescue Plan, the Fiscal Year 2022 budget eliminates the structural deficit and preserves roughly \$2.1 billion of general funds, including an estimated cash balance of \$679 million and a rainy day fund balance of \$1.4 billion. \$54 billion is appropriated to the FY2022 Budget, \$2.3 billion (4.2%) less than in FY2021. General Funds appropriation grew \$2 billion (10.9%) compared to FY21 adjusted working appropriation. Special fund education aid increases by almost \$305 million (60.9%), including \$214 million for hold harmless grants. Critical maintenance projects at State parks will receive \$23 million, including \$3 million for preservation of state lakes. \$13.5 billion is provided for Medicaid, an increase of \$673 million to support the increased enrollment. Many of the appropriations will be one time expenditures made possible because of the federal stimulus. The budget is forecast to be structurally balanced in Fiscal Years 2023 and 2024.

The Administration’s Relief Act (SB496) provides financial assistance to the reopening of schools, individuals, businesses, nonprofit organizations, and funding for specified State agencies. Included in this funding was \$2 million for MARBIDCO and \$1.5 million for TEDCO.

Broadband Highlights

Broadband expansion was a major component of the 2021 legislative session and received \$300 million in funding, which included \$30 million for FY2021 rural broadband projects and \$15.2 million for FY2022 rural broadband projects. Major broadband legislation passed as well, including the codification of The Office of Statewide Broadband, previously the Office of Rural Broadband, while keeping the Rural Broadband Assistance Fund open for federal funding (SB66/HB97 Sponsors: Senator Elfreth, Delegate Lierman). Additionally, the establishment of joint trenching in Maryland, which will allow broadband wires to be installed along trenches underground (SB824/HB1328 Sponsors: Senator Hester, Delegate Feldmark). This new legislation and funding for broadband will make a major impact on efforts to close the digital divide and ensure that all Marylanders have access to highspeed internet.

RMC Budget Priorities Achieved Under House Bill 588 and 589

- ⇒ RMC will receive \$6 million in funding for the Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund (RMPIF).
- ⇒ The Maryland Agricultural Education and Rural Development Assistance Fund (MAERDAF) will receive \$118,485.
- ⇒ The five Regional Councils were funded at \$200,000 each.
- ⇒ The Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO) will receive \$2.735 million in FY22.
- ⇒ The Next Generation Farmland Acquisition Program received pre-authorization for \$2.5 million annually from FY23 through FY27.
- ⇒ \$300 million of federal stimulus funding is allocated to expanding access to broadband, and \$75 million for workforce training and apprenticeships to enable the unemployed and underemployed to obtain jobs.



Photo: From left to right Senate President Bill Ferguson, Governor Larry Hogan, and House Speaker Adrienne Jones signing SB66 on April 13, 2021



Maryland Day

On March 25, 2021, the RMC held a *Grab and Go Lunch* for the Legislators at Lawyers Mall in downtown Annapolis. The event was sponsored by the Maryland Broadband Cooperative, the Rural Maryland Foundation, and the Southern Maryland Agriculture Development Cooperative. The lunches were provided by Caroline County's Chesapeake Culinary Center and consisted of locally grown foods. The event concluded with statements by Lieutenant Governor Boyd Rutherford, the Secretary of Maryland DNR Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio, and RMC Chair John Hartline.



Photo: Lieutenant Governor Boyd Rutherford, Secretary of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio, and Rural Maryland Council Chair John Hartline at Lawyers Mall during the Maryland Day event. Photo Credit: Tom Nappi

Rural Maryland Day

Rural Maryland Day was celebrated virtually this year on February 11, 2021. The event provided an opportunity for over 100 rural advocates to meet one-on-one with key legislators to discuss both the strengths and challenges experienced living in rural Maryland. The event concluded with a video message from the Governor and the presentation of a digital proclamation. Additional recognitions included a Department of Agriculture Secretary's Citation and both a Senate and House resolution recognizing the Council's 25th anniversary.

Rural Legislative Highlights:

- The inclusion of an extra \$200/student in the per pupil foundation amount for education technology (SB965/HB1372 Sponsors: Senate President Ferguson and House Speaker Jones).
- The expansion of telehealth and audio only medical services (SB3/HB123 Sponsors: Senator Melony Griffith, Delegate Joseline Pena-Melnyk).
- The expansion of tax credits for preceptors in areas with health care workforce shortages (SB102/HB1252 Sponsors: Senator Eckardt, Speaker Pro Tem Sample-Hughes).
- Establishment of the Maryland Behavioral Health and Public Safety Center of Excellence (SB857/HB1280 Sponsors: Senators Hester and Smith, Delegate Pena-Melnyk).
- Altered the noticed requirement for the sale of mobile home parks from 5 to 30 days (SB474/HB384 Sponsors: Senator Eckardt, Pro Tem Sample-Hughes).
- Established the Maryland Food System Resiliency to address food insecurity in the State (SB723/HB831 Sponsors: Senator Hester, Delegate Charkoudian).
- Established a State goal of preserving 1,030,000 acres of productive agricultural land by 2030 (SB692/HB860 Sponsors: Senator Young, Delegate Gilchrist).

Legislative Highlights

3
EVENTS HELD
Virtual Legislative Lunch on 1/29, Virtual Rural Maryland Day on 2/11, In-person Grab and Go Maryland Day lunch on 3/25

2
RURAL CAUCUS MEETINGS
The Rural Caucus met on 2/11 and 3/11 to discuss issues facing Maryland's rural communities and residents

9
LEGISLATIVE MEETINGS
The Legislative Committee met this session to discuss bills, testimonies, and other legislative matters

60
POSITION STATEMENTS
Position statements submitted to the legislators in support of bills

220
BILLS MONITORED
Total bills monitored throughout the legislative session

RMC is grateful for the hard work of its Legislative Committee and rural advocates who made the 2021 session a success.

Learn more about the Rural Maryland Council at rural.maryland.gov