



RMC Legislative Committee Meeting  
Monday, January 22, 2024  
2:00 pm to 3:00 pm  
Zoom Teleconference  
Agenda

Invited participants: Members of the RMC Legislative Committee  
Lindsay Thompson, RMC Legislative Committee Co-Chair  
Chris Benzing, RMC Legislative Committee Co-Chair  
Charlotte Davis, Executive Director

- I. Welcome and Introductions Lindsay Thompson
- II. Review of January 8, 2024, Meeting Minutes
- III. 2024 Legislative Priorities
- IV. Session Updates
- V. Bill Tracking
  - a. SB360/H350-Operating Budget (RMC level funded)
  - b. SB361/HB351-Capital Budget
  - c. SB362/HB352-BRFA (MDA loses Native Plant specialist, Mel Noland Wood Fund cut 50% to \$500,000 and cuts to community colleges among other things)
  - d. SB146-RPS (cuts out waste to energy, leaves in litter and woody biomass) Hearing is on Thursday (1/25) in the Senate
  - e. SB323-Income Tax-Subtraction Modification-Public Safety Volunteers- we've usually supported. Hearing is on Wednesday (1/24) in the Senate
  - f. SB203-Housing Innovation Pilot Program and Housing Innovation Fund- Hearing is on Thursday (1/25) in the Senate
  - g. HB12-Property Tax Credit-Retail Service Station Conversions - Hearing in the House on Thursday (1/25)
  - h. SB14-Economic Development -Tourism Zones-Designation and Benefits - Bill was heard in B&T on 1/18. Supported by MML. Should include counties.
- VI. Other
  - a. Legislative Luncheon- January 26, 2024
  - b. Rural Maryland Day – February 8, 2024
  - c. Maryland Day – March 25, 2024
- VII. Adjourn

**Next Meeting: Monday, February 5, 2024, 2 pm – 3 pm, Zoom Teleconference**



## RMC Legislative Committee Meeting Minutes

Date: Monday, January 8, 2024

Time: 2:00 pm to 3:00 pm Type: Zoom Teleconference

Participants: Lindsay Thompson, Scott Warner, Gregory Padgham, Chris Benzing, Janice Palmer, Nancy Nunn, John Hartline, Kim Kratovil, Jamar Day, Joe Hinson, Rachel Jones, Edward Holland, Steve McHenry, Alyssa Hastings, Josh Bollinger, Beth Hill, Alice Settle-Raskin, Susanne Richards, Don Mulrine, Bill Valentine, Jacinta Bottoms-Spencer, Daniel Rider, Amy Keller

RMC Staff: Charlotte Davis, Megan D'Arcy, Molli Cole, Amanda Clevenger

Legislative Committee Co-chair Lindsay Thompson welcomed everyone and convened the meeting at 2:01 pm. Ms. Thompson asked the committee to review the October 4, 2023, Meeting minutes.

Ms. Charlotte Davis shared the updated RMC 2024 Legislative Priorities with the committee. She asked the committee to review the highlighted sections in the document. The committee discussed changing the wording in the last paragraph under the Viable Agriculture, Aquaculture, Forestry & Rural Communities section to **“RMC is also interested in land use decisions that may adversely impact agriculture production particularly in regard to the expansion of solar arrays.”** Also, the committee decided to wait to see if the \$300,000 request will be included in the Governor’s budget for the Rural Health and Human Services Transportation Pilot Program before deciding to include it in the Legislative Priorities document. A final version of the 2024 Legislative Priorities document was decided to be presented to the RMC Executive Board on January 26, 2024, for final approval.

Ms. Charlotte Davis shared the 2024 Legislative Session Preview with the committee. She mentioned that the Appropriations Committee Maryland House of Delegates has a new committee member, Delegate Courtney Watson. She also stated that the 2024 session pre-files have been distributed and that the bill text will be available to review on Wednesday, January 10<sup>th</sup>. Ms. Davis stated that any bills of interest for the RMC should be sent to RMC staff to add to the bill tracking list. The committee reviewed the session Policy Issues including Program Open Space, MACo Housing Package, SDAT Agriculture, Solar Siting, and Blueprint. A decision was made to include them as possible talking points for Rural Maryland Day. Ms. Lindsay Thompson mentioned that the Legislative Committee will meet every other Monday during session and if a bill is due before the next committee meeting an email will be sent out for thoughts on the bill. Ms. Lindsay Thompson also reviewed the upcoming events for the 2024 Legislative Session with the committee. She mentioned that the RMC is open to any suggestions for the Maryland Day event timeframe.

With no other business to discuss, Mr. Don Mulrine made the motion to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Lindsay Thompson seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 2:50 pm.



**RMC**  
Rural Maryland Council

# Rural Maryland Council 2024 Legislative Priorities

*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.*

In December 2023, the Bureau of Revenue Estimates reported revenues slightly below expectations and made minor adjustments to Fiscal Year 2024 revenues. The economic forecast is largely unchanged, reflects low growth rates but does not include a recession. Elevated risks to the revenue forecast remain including the ongoing impacts of COVID-19 as well as a potential federal government shutdown. The current forecast reflects a structural imbalance over the five-year period as ongoing spending outpaces ongoing revenues and does not account for weakening economic conditions that could lead to a recession.

**Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund (RMPIF):** As Maryland recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, the rural areas of the state continue to struggle to recover economically as reflected in unemployment and poverty rates. **To address these disparities, funding of the Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund (RMPIF) remains a top priority.** Rural areas always see a delay in the impact and recovery of economic impacts and events. Our rural areas have not fully recovered from the last economic recession when the recent pandemic hit. It is important that rural areas receive the investments they need to recover at the same rate as the rest of Maryland. In Fiscal Year 2024, our grant program had 192 applicants requesting \$20,763,664, out of which 98 grants, totaling \$8,714,679 were awarded. **We respectfully ask for level funding of \$9 million in the Fiscal Year 2025 operating budget.**

For the Maryland General Assembly's 2024 Legislative Session, the Rural Maryland Council supports the following legislative priorities:

**Housing:** Rural communities face unique challenges when dealing with the affordable, obtainable, and workforce housing crisis because development does not generally occur at a large scale in rural areas, and construction costs are often higher in rural communities compared to urban areas, which reduces the incentives for private investment. Additionally, a lack of access to credit in many rural areas limits funding for maintenance of existing units. RMC supports efforts to repair and weatherize homes to keep seniors aging in their homes as well as the production of additional workforce housing units to serve public service and moderate-income workers.

**Rural Health:** Rural Maryland currently experiences a shortage of health care providers particularly in primary care, specialty areas, mental health, and dental care. Moreover, rural populations are also overall older and in worst health than their suburban counterparts. RMC supports efforts to enable and expand telehealth to provide access to preventative, socio-behavioral and critical care services in rural areas. The Council also supports strategies to address health work force shortages such as shortening the length of training or offering test out options for workers licensed in other states. Of particular concern is the nation-wide closure of pharmacies which could create additional "pharmacy deserts" in rural communities.

## Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Priorities

The rural areas of the state continue to struggle to recover economically as reflected in unemployment and poverty rates.



### Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund

- \$9,000,000
- Supports entrepreneurship, infrastructure and health care



### Maryland Agricultural Education and Rural Development Assistance Fund

- \$167,000
- Builds capacity of rural-serving nonprofits



### Rural Maryland Council

- \$750,000
- Supports the Council's staff, grant administration and event planning expenses



### Regional Councils

- \$200,000 each for maintaining the current funding of the State's five regional councils at the historic levels
- Support the Small, Women and Minority-Owned Business Account fund



### MARBIDCO

- \$4,235,000 for Core loan and small grant programs, watermen's microloans, local farm food enterprise and WPIE grants, and livestock/blue catfish processing equipment grants

**Viability Agriculture, Aquaculture, Forestry & Rural Communities:** Agriculture remains Maryland's largest commercial economic sector and is incredibly important to our rural areas. RMC supports programs and policies that will sustain and enhance agricultural production and agritourism. RMC also supports efforts to address food security and other policies that build strong rural communities:

- Adequate funding to ensure the retention and placement of University of Maryland Extension (College Park and Princess Anne) agricultural agents in each county and provide for appropriate agricultural research;
- Adequate funding for the Chesapeake Bay Trust Fund;
- Land preservation programs such as Program Open Space, which funds Rural Legacy and the Maryland Agriculture Land Preservation Foundation;
- Expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit to ensure low-income workers and families access to basic necessities and providing an economic boost to neighborhood businesses;
- Core Smart Growth programs such as the Maryland Heritage Structure Rehabilitation Tax Credit, Maryland Heritage Area Grants, and the Community Investment Tax Credit; and
- Expanded funding for the Department of Housing and Community Development's Community Legacy, Strategic Demolition and Smart Growth Impact Fund; Neighborhood Business Works and Rental Housing Works programs.

RMC is also interested in land use decisions that may adversely impact agriculture production, particularly in regard to solar arrays without local input. The Council opposes any tax or fee imposed on agricultural products such as poultry.

**Broadband and Infrastructure:** Infrastructure improvements remain a key piece of place making strategies in creating and retaining vibrancy in our rural communities including rural broadband expansion. Rural Maryland remains slightly older in population and efforts and outreach should be made to address broadband affordability and adoptability to ensure digital inclusion of all Maryland residents.

**Transportation:** RMC supports the distribution of transportation funding for Local Governments and expansion of heavy rail for commerce, transit, and tourism-related purposes. Non-emergency health care transportation is a concern as well as the repair and reconstruction of bridges across the state. We believe a new model of rural transit systems should be developed including utilizing smaller vehicles, relying on less fixed route coordination, more on demand services, and access to additional resources. We are requesting \$300,000 for a rural health and human services transportation pilot program.

**Rural Economic Development:** The Council supports efforts to encourage rural economic development in the form of tax credits to new or expanding businesses in rural Maryland. This includes tax credits for broadband expansion, services and a sales tax exemption of broadband equipment, and income tax credit for angel investments. These initiatives will attract and expand industry sectors other than cyber and biotechnology to all jurisdictions across the state, in part encouraging needed investment in the rural counties of Maryland.

**Energy:** The Council supports energy policies that promote long-term, locally generated, renewable energy. Funding in the amount of \$1,000,000 for the Wood Products Industry Equity Investment Fund (WPIEI) should be considered. To reach renewable energy goals, upgrades in electric infrastructure will need to be made.

**Rural Workforce Development:** The Council supports apprenticeships and community colleges so young adults can stay in their rural areas and become part of the rural workforce. Efforts to improve career and technology education through implementation of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, including specifically agriculture education.

**Public Safety:** Small rural volunteer fire and emergency agencies find it difficult to recruit and retain qualified trainees and employees. Efforts should be considered that allows rural emergency services access to workforce development tools.

FY2024 RMC Bill Tracker						
Bill #	XFile	Sponsor	Title	Current Status	RMC Position	Notes
HB0003	SB0356	Delegate Stewart	Land Use - Expedited Development Review Processes for Affordable Housing - Requirements	In the House - Hearing 1/30 at 1:00 p.m.		MACo position? Requires county to establish and implement
HB0007	SB0203	Delegate Stewart	Housing Innovation Fund - Establishment (Housing Innovation Pilot Program Act of 2024)	In the House - Hearing 1/30 at 1:00 p.m.		Needs amends to cover rural counties without housing authorities
HB0012	SB0067	Delegate Ruth	Property Tax Credit - Retail Service Station Conversions	In the House - Hearing 1/25 at 1:00 p.m.		Abandoned stations are an issue in many rural towns
HB0026	SB0215	Chair, Ways and Means	Small, Minority, and Women-Owned Businesses Account - Alterations	In the House - Hearing 1/17 at 1:00pm - Ways and Means	Monitor	Authorizes grants up to \$10000
HB0085		Delegate Lehman	Department of Agriculture - Spay/Neuter Fund	In the House - Hearing 2/07 at 2:30 p.m.	Monitor	
HB0113	SB0042	Delegate Lehman	Vehicle Laws - Horse Riding - Helmet Requirements for Minors	In the House - Hearing 2/01 at 1:00 p.m.	Monitor	
HB0120	SB0032	Delegate Morgan, T.	Economic Development - Maryland Watermen's Microloan Program - Eligibility	In the House - Hearing 2/07 at 2:30 p.m.	Monitor	
HB0163	SB0056	Delegate Charkoudian	Food Waste and Solid Waste Reduction - Grants, Fund, and Surcharge	In the House - Hearing 2/07 at 2:30 p.m.	Monitor	
HB0166	SB0146	Delegate Stewart	Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard - Eligible Sources - Alterations (Reclaim Renewable Energy Act of 2024)	In the House - First Reading Economic Matters	Monitor	Takes out Waste to Energy and Refuse but leaves poultry litter and biomass
HB0186		Delegate Hartman	Eastern Shore Code Counties - Maximum Hotel Rental Tax - Alteration	In the House - Hearing 2/01 at 1:00 p.m.	Monitor	
HB0210		Delegate Acevero	Maryland Building Performance Standards - Fossil Fuel Use and Electric-Ready Standards	In the House - First Reading Environment and Transportation and Economic Matters	Monitor	
HB0225	SB0309	Chair, Environment and	Smart Growth Subcabinet - Membership and Duties	In the House - Hearing 1/30 at 1:00 p.m.	Monitor	
HB0228	SB0259	Chair, Environment and	Natural Resources - Maryland State Parks - Funds and Plan Alterations	In the House - First Reading Environment and Transportation and Appropriations	Monitor	
HB0233	SB0306	Chair, Environment and	Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area Protection Program - Climate, Equity, and Administrative Provisions	In the House - Hearing 2/07 at 2:30pm		
HB0234	SB0278	Chair, Environment and	Department of Agriculture - Licensing, Registration, Fees and Penalties, and Regulation	In the House - Hearing 2/07 at 2:30 p.m.	Monitor	
HB0258	SB0416	Delegate Qi	Renewable Energy - Customer-Sited Solar Program	In the House - First Reading Economic Matters		
HB0283	SB0333	Delegate Palakovich Ca	Housing and Community Development - Affordable Housing - Identifying Suitable Property	In the House - Hearing 2/06 at 1:30 p.m.		
HB0350	SB0360	Speaker	Budget Bill (Fiscal Year 2025)	In the House - First Reading Appropriations	Support Governor's appropriation	
HB0351	SB0361	Speaker	Creation of a State Debt - Maryland Consolidated Capital Bond Loan of 2024, and the Maryland Consolidated Capital Bond Loans of 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023	In the House - First Reading Appropriations	Monitor	
HB0352	SB0362	Speaker	Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act of 2024	In the House - First Reading Appropriations	Monitor	cuts native plant position at MDA, cuts Mel Noland Fund to \$500,000
HB0357	SB0193	Delegate Terrasa	Agriculture - Confinement of Egg-Laying Hens in Commercial Egg Production - Prohibitions	In the House - Hearing 2/14 at 1:00 p.m.	Monitor	
HB0365	SB0110	Delegate Ghrist	School Construction - Local Cost-Share - Alterations	In the House - Hearing 2/06 at 1:00 p.m.		
HB0366	SB0049	Delegate Smith	Restrictions on Use - Solar Collector Systems - Alteration	In the House - Hearing 2/13 at 1:00 p.m.		
HB0425	SB0359	Delegate Rosenberg	Advanced Practice Registered Nurse Compact	In the House - Hearing 2/06 at 1:00 p.m.	Support	HB475 from last year
SB0012		Senator Ellis	College of Southern Maryland - Board of Trustees Membership - Alterations	In the Senate - Hearing 1/24 at 2:00 p.m.	Monitor	
SB0014		Senator Jackson	Economic Development - Tourism Zones Designation and Benefits	In the Senate - Hearing 1/18 at 12:00 p.m.	?	MML bill. Should include counties.
SB0030		Senator Ellis	Maryland Economic Development Assistance Authority and Fun - High Impact Development Project Program	In the Senate - First Reading Finance	Monitor	\$600,000,000 mandate

SB0032	HB0120	Senator Bailey	Economic Development - Maryland Watermen's Microloan Program - Eligibility	In the Senate - First Reading Finance	Monitor	
SB0033		Senator Rosapepe	More Opportunities for Career-Focused Students Act of 2024	In the Senate - First Reading Education, Energy, and the Environment	Support	SB121 last session
SB0042	HB0113	Senator Kelly	Vehicle Laws - Horse Riding - Helmet Requirements for Minors	In the Senate - Hearing 1/31 at 1:00 p.m.		
SB0049	HB0366	Senator Elfreth	Restrictions on Use - Solar Collector Systems - Alteration	In the Senate - Hearing 2/08 at 1:00 p.m.		
SB0056	HB0163	Senator Hester	Food Waste and Solid Waste Reduction - Grants, Fund, and Surcharge	In the Senate - First Reading Education, Energy, and the Environment	Monitor	
SB0067	HB0012	Senator Brooks	Property Tax Credit - Retail Service Station Conversions	In the Senate - Hearing 1/18 at 12:00 p.m.		
SB0074		Senator Ellis	State Designations - State Fruit - Persimmon	In the Senate - First Reading Education, Energy, and the Environment		Pawpaw should be the state fruit
SB0085		Senator Washington, M.	Corporations and Associations - Limited Worker Cooperative Associations - Authorizations (Maryland Limited Cooperative Association Act)	In the Senate - Hearing 2/07 at 2:00 p.m.	Monitor	
SB0095		Senator Carozza	Eastern Shore Code Counties - Maximum Hotel Rental Tax - Alteration	In the Senate - Hearing 1/24 at 1:00 p.m.	Monitor	
SB0097		Senator Hester	Vehicle Laws - Special Registration Plates - Maryland Horse Industry	In the Senate - First Reading Judicial Proceedings	Monitor	To be withdrawn
SB0098		Senator Sailing	Department of Housing and Community Development - Food Desert Study	In the Senate - Hearing 2/08 at 1:00 p.m.	Monitor	
SB0110		Senator Hershey	School Construction - Local Cost-Share - Alterations	In the Senate - Hearing 1/18 at 12:00 p.m.		
SB0137		Senator Rosapepe	Registered Nurse Degree Apprenticeship Program Workgroup	In the Senate - First Reading Finance	Monitor	
SB0146	HB166	Senator Lewis Young	Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard - Eligible Sources - Alterations (Reclaim Renewable Energy Act of 2024)	In the Senate - Hearing 1/25 at 1:00 p.m.	Monitor	Cuts out WTE and refuse fuel but leaves poultry litter, biomass and anaerobic digestion
SB0148		Senator Washington, A.	Comprehensive Flood Management Grant Program - Funding for Underserved and Overburdened Communities	In the Senate - First Reading Education, Energy, and the Environment and Budget and Taxation		
SB0167		Senator Carozza	Physician Assistants - Revisions (Physician Assistant Modernization Act of 2024)	In the Senate - First Reading Finance		
SB0193	HB0357	Senator Lewis Young	Agriculture - Confinement of Egg-Laying Hens in Commercial Egg Production - Prohibitions	In the Senate - Hearing 1/23 at 1:00 p.m.		
SB0203	HB0007	Senator Waldstreicher	Housing Innovation Pilot Program and Housing Innovation Fund - Establishment (Housing Innovation Pilot Program Act of 2024)	In the Senate - Hearing 1/25 at 1:00 p.m.		
SB0215	HB0026	Chair, Finance Committee	Small, Minority, and Women-Owned Businesses Account - Alterations	In the Senate - First Reading Finance	Monitor	
SB0255		Chair, Education, Energy	Public Safety - Volunteer Company Assistance Fund - Alterations	In the Senate - Hearing 2/01 at 1:00 p.m.		transfers loan program from Military Dept to MDEM
SB0259	HB0228	Chair, Budget and Taxat	Natural Resources - Maryland State Parks - Funds and Plan Alterations	In the Senate - Hearing 1/24 at 1:00 p.m.	Monitor	
SB0278	HB0234	Chair, Education, Energy	Department of Agriculture - Licensing, Registration, Fees and Penalties, and Regulation	In the Senate - Hearing 1/23 at 1:00 p.m.	Monitor	
SB0301		Chair, Education, Energy	Aquaculture - Placement of Shellfish, Bags, Nets, and Structures on Submerged Aquatic Vegetation - Extension	In the Senate - Hearing 1/23 at 1:00 p.m.	Monitor	
SB0303		Chair, Education, Energy	Aquaculture - Definition of Shellfish - Alteration	In the Senate - Hearing 1/23 at 1:00 p.m.	Monitor	
SB0306		Chair, Education, Energy	Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area Protection Program - Climate, Equity, and Administrative Provisions	In the Senate - Hearing 1/31 at 2:00 p.m.		
SB0309	HB0225	Chair, Education, Energy	Sustainable Growth Subcabinet Repeal of the Office of Smart Growth	In the Senate - Hearing 2/01 at 1:00 p.m.	Monitor	takes out Special Secretary
SB0311		Senator West	Agriculture - Maryland Food and Agricultural Resiliency Mechanism Grant Program - Expansion	In the Senate - Hearing 1/23 at 1:00 p.m.	Monitor	

SB0317		Senator Bailey	Oysters, Striped Bass, and Crabs - Commercial Authorizations - Suspensions and Revocations	In the Senate - Reassigned to Education, Energy, and the Environment	Monitor	
SB0323		Senator Jackson	Income Tax - Subtraction Modification - Public Safety Volunteers	In the Senate - Hearing 1/24 at 1:00 p.m.	Support	SB94 from last session
SB0333	HB0283	Senator Hettleman	Housing and Community Development - Affordable Housing - Identifying Suitable Property	In the Senate - First Reading Education, Energy, and the Environment		
SB0339		Senator Carozza	Environment - Duck Nest Boxes - Wetlands License Requirements	In the Senate - First Reading Education, Energy, and the Environment	Monitor	
SB0356	HB0003	Senator Muse	Land Use - Expedited Development Review Processes for Affordable Housing - Requirements	In the Senate - Hearing 2/01 at 1:00 p.m.		
SB0359	HB0425	Senator Hayes	Advanced Practice Registered Nurse Compact	In the Senate - First Reading Finance	Support	SB439 from last session
SB0360	HB0350	President	Budget Bill (Fiscal Year 2025)	In the Senate - First Reading Budget and Taxation	Support Gov appropriation	
SB0361	HB0351	President	Creation of a State Debt - Maryland Consolidated Capital Bond Loan of 2024, and the Maryland Consolidated Capital Bond Loans of 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023	In the Senate - First Reading Budget and Taxation	Monitor	
SB0362	HB0352	President	Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act of 2024	In the Senate - First Reading Budget and Taxation	Monitor	Cuts MDA's Native Plant position; cuts Mel Noland and community colleges
SB0367		Senator Mautz	Natural Resources - Antlerless Deer Hunting Programs - Authorization	In the Senate - First Reading Education, Energy, and the Environment		SB779 last year; support?
SB0407		Senator McKay	Community Colleges - Capital Projects - State Share Adjustment	In the Senate - Hearing 1/31 at 1:00 p.m.	Support	SB297 last year
SB0416	HB0258	Senator Lewis Young	Renewable Energy - Customer-Sited Solar Program	In the Senate - First Reading Education, Energy, and the Environment		