



2024 Rural Maryland Council Legislative Review

The Maryland General Assembly adjourned Sine Die on April 8, 2024 after final passage of the Fiscal Year 2025 Operating Budget and bills concerning crime and juvenile crime reform, alterations to the Blueprint, transportation needs, and housing reform. The Rural Maryland Council and their associated grant programs - the Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund and the Maryland Agricultural Education Rural Development Assistance Fund, received level funding of \$9,010,479 in Fiscal Year 2025. We thank Governor Wes Moore, Senate President Bill Ferguson and House Speaker Adrienne Jones for their support.

Operation and Capital Budget Highlights

During the legislative session, there was a prolonged and heated debate in Maryland over the state's budget priorities. The State Budget faced a temporary standstill before the legislature would adjourn on Sine Die due to the differences between the chambers' proposed budgets. The budget primarily focused on increasing funding for education, providing relief to low-income families, and addressing the urgent transportation needs throughout the state.

However, the final version of the budget was a result of a compromise between the two chambers, and it cut over \$800 million from the House's original proposal, leading to further disagreements and debates.

Despite the passage of the budget, there is still a projected budget gap of around \$3 billion in the coming years, partly due to the Blueprint and other factors. The situation calls for more discussions, negotiations, and planning to address the financial challenges facing the state.

The final budget appropriations for FY2025 amount to \$63 billion, indicating a significant investment in various areas of the state's economy and services.

RMC Legislative Committee

This session, the Rural Maryland Council made the decision to not put forward any immediate legislation and focused their efforts on making sure the Council received full funding in the FY2025 Budget. The Legislative Committee continued to diligently meet throughout the session to discuss the bills RMC should submit testimony for and testify in person in some cases. The Committee plans to meet in July and is already making plans to develop legislation that they would like to propose for the 2025 Legislative Session.

RMC Budget Priorities Achieved Under Senate Bills 360 and 362:

- ⇒ RMC will receive \$9 million for the Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund and RMC operations.
- ⇒ Maryland Department of Natural Resources (MD DNR) Local Program Open Space will receive approximately \$32 million. The MD DNR State Program Open Space will receive \$17.6 million.
- ⇒ Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF) will receive \$36.5 million.
- ⇒ Rural Legacy Program funded at \$15.3 million.
- ⇒ Department of Housing and Community Development receives \$172.7 million for broadband assistance in the State.
- ⇒ The City of Westminster will receive \$1 million to continue on their fiber project.
- ⇒ The University of Maryland Eastern Shore will receive \$4.4 million for their new Agriculture Research Building.
- ⇒ DNR will receive \$5 million for their Community Parks and Playgrounds program.



Members of the RMC Legislative Committee with Delegates Stuart Schmidt and Scott Phillips at the RMC Spring Executive Board Meeting.

The Rural Maryland Council would like to thank the many legislators and staffers who worked with the Council this year to accomplish their legislative goals.

Outreach Events

Legislative Welcome Breakfast was held on January 12, 2024. RMC hosted a legislative welcome breakfast to take the opportunity to welcome new and returning legislators back for a new term. This event was held at the Maryland Inn and had a very successful turnout of a total of 140 participants. A number of notable legislators from across the state joined the event and met with several participants to learn about RMC 2024 Legislative Priorities. The Event was sponsored by Maryland Agricultural Education Foundation (MAEF), American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) Maryland, and the Community Development Network of Maryland (CDN).

Quarterly Executive Board Meeting and Legislative Luncheon was held on January 26, 2024 at the Rams Head Live venue with approximately 99 participants in attendance. Senator Ben Cardin made a surprise visit and addressed the audience. Guest speakers included Maryland Department of Agriculture Secretary Kevin Atticks and Tribal Chair of the Piscataway Conoy Tribe Francis Gray. Bill and Christina Schindler of Modern Stone Age Kitchen in Chestertown were the business spotlight.

Rural Maryland Day was celebrated virtually this year on February 8, 2024. The event provided an opportunity for over 80 rural advocates to meet with 40 key legislators to discuss both the strengths and challenges experienced living in rural Maryland.

Maryland Day was held on March 25, 2024. RMC held a “Maryland Day Mocktails and Munchies” event for the Legislators on the Lawyer’s Mall in downtown Annapolis. A total of 200 snack boxes were distributed. The event was sponsored by the Maryland Broadband Cooperative, Horizon Farm Credit, Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission (SMADC), Maryland Department of Agriculture - Maryland's Best, Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO), Maryland Heritage Areas Coalition, the Southern Maryland National Heritage Area, and the Maryland Horse Industry Board.



Photo: The Maryland Day Event hosted by the Rural Maryland Council on the Lawyer's Mall of Downtown Annapolis. Sponsors showcased some of Maryland's best rural goods and services.

Legislative Highlights

4

EVENTS HELD

Welcome Breakfast, 1/12

Legislative Lunch, 1/26

Virtual Rural Maryland Day, 2/8

Maryland Day Mocktails & Munchies, 3/25

10

LEGISLATIVE MEETINGS

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

58

POSITION STATEMENTS

Position statements submitted to the legislators in support of bills

215

BILLS MONITORED

Total bills monitored throughout the legislative session

Rural Legislative Highlights

- The Northern Snakehead has been renamed to the “Chesapeake Channa” (SB207/HB19).
- Venison can be donated to certain organizations (ex. Food banks) for tax credit (SB440/HB447).
- Antlerless Deer hunting is extended into January through a lottery system to help mitigate crop damage via the deer population (SB367/HB481).
- Those in the Firefighter and EMS Career fields now can apply for state scholarships and loan repayment assistance through state program (SB691/HB899).
- Telehealth appointment options expanded to students throughout the state, a critical asset during the health workforce shortage (SB492/HB522).
- Expansion of apprenticeships in the Public Safety Workforce to increase attraction and retention of these careers (SB470/HB597).

RMC is grateful for the hard work of its Legislative Committee and rural advocates who made the 2024 Session a success. To learn more about RMC, visit rural.maryland.gov.