



Rural Maryland Council 2026 Legislative Priorities

As the statewide voice for rural Maryland, the Rural Maryland Council develops a legislative priorities document each year to clearly communicate the needs, challenges, and opportunities facing our rural communities. This annual guide helps inform policymakers, strengthen advocacy efforts, and ensure that public policy decisions reflect the unique circumstances of rural Maryland while supporting our mission to improve quality of life and preserve rural heritage.



Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund (RMPIF): Top Priority

To meet statewide demand and generate meaningful impact in rural Maryland, the Council supports \$9 million as the appropriate funding level. However, due to the fiscal realities facing the State, the Rural Maryland Council understands the 30% reduction in the FY2027 budget to \$6 million.

The Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund (RMPIF) is essential to helping rural communities recover and grow at a pace comparable to the rest of Maryland. The program supports economic development, health care, workforce training, and critical community infrastructure across rural regions of the state. Recent funding reductions have significantly limited the program's impact. After two consecutive years of 30 percent cuts, the Council then received \$6 million in FY2026, despite 170 applications requesting more than \$14 million in funding. As a result, only 62 projects were funded, totaling \$5,468,485.

Advancing Rural Maryland: RMC's 2026 Legislative Priorities:



Regional Councils: The Council supports the five rural regional councils strengthening regional collaboration, local capacity, and economic resilience in rural Maryland.



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.



Viable 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:

Agriculture Priority Actions:

- Ensure adequate funding for University of Maryland Extension agricultural agents and research
- Sustain funding for the Chesapeake Bay Trust Fund
- Repay Program Open Space funds to protect farmland through the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF) easement program, natural resources, and outdoor recreation
- Expand the Earned Income Tax Credit to support low-income families and local businesses
- Maintain core Smart Growth programs, including the Maryland Heritage Structure Rehabilitation Tax Credit, Maryland Heritage Area Grants, and Community Investment Tax Credit
- Increase funding for Community Legacy, Strategic Demolition, Smart Growth Impact Fund, Neighborhood Business Works, and Rental Housing Works
- Support livestock processing efforts

RMC is also interested in land use decisions that may affect agricultural production, including the siting of large-scale solar arrays without local input, eminent domain on preserved properties, and data center or transmission line placement on farmland. The Council supports expanding market access for farmers through institutional procurement reform.



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 in highway user revenues sharing formula 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.



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. Requesting \$100,000 for the Rural Readiness Program and Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund.



Energy: The Council supports policies that promote long-term, locally generated energy, including from renewable sources.



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.

