

17. WICOMICO; AND

18. WORCESTER; AND

(II) PORTIONS OF OTHER COUNTIES IN CLOSE PROXIMITY TO AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITY.

(8) "RURAL COMMUNITY" MEANS AN INCORPORATED OR UNINCORPORATED AREA OF A COUNTY OR GROUP OF COUNTIES IN A RURAL AREA.

(B) THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY FINDS THAT:

(1) MANY RURAL COMMUNITIES IN THE STATE FACE A HOST OF DIFFICULT CHALLENGES RELATING TO PERSISTENT UNEMPLOYMENT AND POVERTY, CHANGING TECHNOLOGICAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS, AN AGING POPULATION AND AN OUT-MIGRATION OF YOUTH, INADEQUATE ACCESS TO QUALITY HOUSING, HEALTH CARE AND OTHER SERVICES, AND DETERIORATING OR INADEQUATE TRANSPORTATION, COMMUNICATIONS, SANITATION, AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INFRASTRUCTURE;

(2) MARYLAND'S AGRICULTURAL AND RESOURCE-BASED INDUSTRIES CONTINUE TO UNDERPIN THE LOCAL ECONOMIES OF RURAL COMMUNITIES BUT ARE INCREASINGLY UNDER THREAT FROM NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL MARKET COMPETITION, URBAN ENCROACHMENT AND LAND DEVELOPMENT PRESSURE, AND ENVIRONMENTAL AND REGULATORY INFLUENCES;

(3) LOCAL GOVERNMENTS, REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS, EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, AND PRIVATE SECTOR SERVICE PROVIDERS HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO MEET ALL THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, AND HUMAN SERVICES NEEDS OF MARYLAND RESIDENTS IN THE RURAL COUNTIES AND MUNICIPAL CORPORATIONS BECAUSE OF A LACK OF ADEQUATE AVAILABLE CAPACITY AND RESOURCES;

(4) THE OBJECTIVE OF THE RURAL MARYLAND PROSPERITY INVESTMENT FUND IS TO HELP RAISE THE OVERALL STANDARD OF LIVING IN RURAL AREAS TO A LEVEL THAT MEETS OR EXCEEDS STATEWIDE BENCHMARK AVERAGES BY 2020, WHILE PRESERVING THE BEST ASPECTS OF A PASTORAL HERITAGE AND RURAL WAY OF LIFE;

(5) RESOURCES PROVIDED TO THE FUND ARE DESIGNED TO FACILITATE SIGNIFICANT TARGETED INVESTMENTS IN IMPORTANT ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS AND PROMOTE REGIONAL AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION;

(6) THESE INVESTMENTS WILL ALSO ENABLE LOCAL AND REGIONAL PUBLIC AND NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS TO LEVERAGE ADDITIONAL NONSTATE FINANCIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES TO FACILITATE THE REALIZATION OF SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES WHILE THE PROGRAM IS IN EFFECT; AND

(7) THE FUND WILL SERVE THE INTERESTS OF THE ENTIRE STATE BY: