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**TESTIMONY**  
**TRI-COUNTY COUNCIL FOR THE LOWER EASTERN SHORE OF**  
**MARYLAND**

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**TO:** DELEGATE DERECK E. DAVIS, CHAIR  
**COMMITTEE:** HOUSE ECONOMIC MATTERS  
**FROM:** TRI-COUNTY COUNCIL FOR THE LOWER EASTERN SHORE  
**SUBJECT:** HB 999 MEMBER-REGULATED COOPERATIVES – ESTABLISHMENT  
(RURAL BROADBAND FOR THE EASTERN SHORE ACT OF 2020)  
**POSITION:** SUPPORT BROADBAND EXPANSION  
**DATE:** MARCH 5, 2020

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Dear Mr. Chairman and Committee Members:

The Tri-County Council for the Lower Eastern Shore of Maryland (TCCLES) supports Choptank Electric Cooperative’s efforts to offer broadband service to their customers. Choptank Electric’s desire to create a regional Internet Service Provider has the potential for significant impact on the rural citizens in their service area. The need for such service has been well documented for many years – from students accessing course material from their homes to businesses communicating with customers and supply chains around the globe.

The TCCLES operates a cooperative regional planning and development agency within Somerset, Wicomico and Worcester counties to foster physical, economic, and social development. The TCCLES is an established U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) Economic Development District (EDD). As an EDD the TCCLES facilitates and produces the Lower Shore Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS).

Broadband connectivity has been a high priority since the CEDS inception in 2002. The current CEDS document (revised June 31, 2019) Goal 3: Infrastructure states,

**“Broadband internet access is a key component of the region’s ability to create, attract, and retain job-creating businesses and institutions. Access improves the productivity and competitiveness of local business and provides additional teleworking opportunities for residents. It also provides better access to local government agencies and educational resources. While broadband access has grown over the past decade, efforts to continue expansion and provide last mile infrastructure is needed to reach currently unserved and underserved populations.” (pg. 43 TCCLES CEDS Brochure)**

To assist in accomplishing this goal the CEDS Strategies and Action Plans (pg. 44 TCCLES CEDS) lists a number of strategies, among which are,

**“Strategy 2: Continue to expand broadband access throughout the region.**

**2.1 Identify areas in need of last mile broadband**

**Metric: Broadband Map”**

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Further discussion in the CEDS of the importance of broadband service and gaps thereof on the Lower Shore include “Resource Based Industries” (pg. 15), “Utilities and Information Technology” (pg. 16), “Heavy Industries” (pg. 19), “Economic Resilience” (pg. 37).

Many entities including the State of Maryland, county and municipal governments, and the TCCLES have been instrumental in establishing, developing, and supporting this effort. A major asset that has been developed over the last thirteen years is the Maryland Broadband Cooperative (MdBC). MdBC offers universal, open access to broadband services via a fiber optic network that serves rural Maryland. Over the years, Choptank Electric has partnered with the MdBC to assist in middle mile deployment of fiber optic cable. This partnership has enabled remote locations on the Eastern Shore to have high-speed internet service.

This latest initiative by Choptank Electric will further enhance the opportunity for rural residents of the Eastern Shore to have access to affordable, high-speed broadband service. The TCCLES, which comprises state, county and municipal elected officials, thoroughly understands the importance of this expanded service. The Council looks forward to Choptank Electric’s expansion of broadband service.