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**Testimony in support of HB 999, Member-Regulated Cooperatives – Establishment (Rural
Broadband for the Eastern Shore Act of 2020)**

Hearing before the House Economic Matters Committee

March 5, 2020

Submitted by Ed Goyda, Director, Somerset County Library

Dear Chair Davis, Vice-Chair Dumais, and Distinguished Members of the Committee:

I am writing to support *HB 999 Member-Regulated Cooperatives – Establishment (Rural Broadband for the Eastern Shore Act of 2020)*.

The bill allows Choptank Electric Cooperative to become a “Member Regulated Cooperative” in order to relieve regulatory and economic hurdles to incentivize broadband deployment to the home.

As director of the Somerset County Library, I am acutely aware of the importance of broadband to our County’s residents. More than 50,000 customers connect to broadband at the County’s three libraries each year, and home broadband connections are simply unavailable to large parts of the County’s rural population.

Many fundamental life tasks are now internet-based – employers require online applications, taxes need to be filed online, and school assignments, at both the K-12 and collegiate levels, need to be submitted online. We are currently preparing our staff to assist patrons in completing the online Census 2020 questionnaires, which will be vital in assuring that a complete count is obtained and affect federal funding for the State of Maryland for the next decade and which we are confident that members of our rural population will be reliant on the libraries to provide access to.

The lack of population density outside of the Rt. 13/413 corridor presents little motivation for large for-profit broadband suppliers to invest in new infrastructure, leaving residents in these areas on the wrong side of the broadband gap.

The Somerset County Library, like other libraries in rural areas (and libraries in general), continuously adds online services to give our patrons access to library services 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. These include ebook downloads, video streaming, and online courses available to all members of our community. But truly equitable access to these resources requires that all community members are able to connect from their homes, which the lack of broadband in many areas prevents.

As the Director of the Somerset County Library and a resident of the County, I urge the Committee to report favorably on HB999. Thank you very much for your consideration and continued support of Maryland libraries and the Eastern Shore.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ed Goyda".

Ed Goyda, Director

Somerset County Library

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