



Maryland
Hospital Association

March 5, 2020

To: The Honorable Dereck Davis, Chairman
House Economic Matters Committee

From: Jennifer Witten, Vice President, Government Affairs
Maryland Hospital Association

Re: Letter of Support - House Bill 999 – Member-Regulated Cooperatives – Establishment
(Rural Broadband for the Eastern Shore Act of 2020)

Dear Chairman Davis :

On behalf of the Maryland Hospital Association's (MHA) 61-member hospitals and health systems, we appreciate the opportunity to comment on House Bill 999. Maryland's hospitals support accessibility and quality of telecommunications services in rural areas, which allows health care providers to care for patients anytime, anywhere.

Broadband internet access is critical to ensure this technology is deployed to its fullest potential. A 2019 report from an Intergovernmental Advisory Committee to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) found broadband access in rural areas is still woefully fragmented.¹ As FCC Chairman Ajit Pai succinctly stated, "We can't realize the promise of telehealth without connectivity." This is especially true for our neighbors in Maryland's Eastern Shore, where the digital divide needs to be closed.

In an interim report to the Maryland Health Care Commission, the Workgroup on Rural Health Delivery recommended that Maryland expand the availability of telehealth, in part through an increase in broadband and "last mile" connectivity.² In the Task Force on Rural Internet, Broadband, Wireless, and Cellular Services report, the group recommended allowing existing electric utility infrastructure for broadband delivery.³ HB 999 takes these two recommendations and offers a viable solution, using Choptank Electric's existing expertise in "last mile"

¹ Intergovernmental Advisory Committee to the Federal Communications Commission, "Advisory Recommendation No: 2019-2 In the Matter of State, Local Tribal, and Territorial Regulatory and Other Barriers and Incentives to Telemedicine." Available at docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-360696A5.pdf.

² Workgroup on Rural Health Delivery, "Transforming Maryland's rural healthcare system: A regional approach to rural healthcare delivery." Available at mhcc.maryland.gov/mhcc/pages/home/workgroups/documents/rural_health/Final%20Report/LGSRPT_FinalReport_rpt_23102017.pdf.

³ Task Force on Rural Internet, Broadband, Wireless and Cellular Service, "House Bill 243 – Task Force on Rural Internet, Broadband, Wireless and cellular Service – Study and Extension: Task Force Report." Available at rural.maryland.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2019/01/2018_MSAR11544_Task-Force-for-Rural-Internet-Broadband-Wireless-and-Cellular-Service-Report-1.pdf.

connectivity and applying those resources to the provision of broadband. In turn, that directly supports the expansion of telehealth, which virtually connects providers and patients remotely.

In Maryland, telehealth supports the success of the Total Cost of Care Model, as care delivery can be streamlined, and providers can optimize their time with patients. Payers, health care providers, and patients agree telehealth is a promising way to expand access to cost-efficient care and to deliver that care in a setting tailored to each patient's needs.

Health care providers are eager to broaden the delivery of care via telehealth, but to do so requires a corresponding shift in thinking about how broadband access can be delivered to rural populations. House Bill 999 is instrumental to furthering these goals, so we urge a favorable report.

For more information, please contact:
Jennifer Witten
Jwitten@mhaonline.org