

HB 999 Dave Bromwell, Superintendent Dorchester County Public Schools Testimony

Hello, my name is Dave Bromwell, Superintendent of Dorchester County Public Schools. I represent the largest county in the state of MD when you include our marshlands and waterways, thus the opportunity to speak in regards to Rural Broadband for the Eastern Shore Act of 2020 is greatly appreciated as it directly effects my county and my neighboring county students, families, and professionals.

Thank you----committee for allowing me to speak in regards to House Bill 999. I had the opportunity to hear quite a few bills yesterday and I certainly respect the time and effort you give to hearing everyone today.

Reliable and affordable high-speed internet e-Connectivity, or electronic connectivity, is fundamental for educational economic activity throughout the US.

Access to high-speed internet is vital for college and career readiness of our MD students but also diverse sets of industries, including agricultural production, manufacturing, and forestry, and acts as a catalyst for rural prosperity by enabling efficient, modern communications between rural American households, schools, healthcare centers as well as markets and customers around the world.

This is why the Eastern Shore Superintendents Association feels Connectivity for all rural areas in MD is a modern-day necessity – not simply an amenity – in today’s information-driven global economy.

While my Honorable Colleague Dr. Patty Saelens focused on our students which I am in 100% agreement with her statements and core beliefs; I am going to try and give you a different perspective for our local school systems.

Presently, Dorchester County as well as other area counties provide school access through our school management system----Power School for parents. Parents are able to see and communicate with schools and school personnel through this district management system. Truthfully, as wonderful as it is, we are NOT touching in our estimate at least 40% of our educational stakeholders because they don’t have internet access.

Recently we just updated and changed our District Website for Dorchester County and while I think it is greatly improved with easy access for students and parents--

----we have a considerable number who cannot gain access as they just don't have internet service. Dorchester County has 3 separate Islands where simple cell phone service can be challenged.

One area that Dorchester County, school districts in the state and across the country are addressing is the implementation of SAFETY protocols in the event of an extreme emergency situation. Dorchester County Public Schools is the first county in the state of MD to be fully certified with ALICE as a district. ALICE is Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter and Evacuate.

With the implementation of this safety protocol districtwide we have placed on our website a great deal of safety learning modules involving ALICE for our parents and community. As good as this information is-----it is only as good as how we get it to our parents and families.

With NO internet or broadband service, we are limited to mailing pamphlets only to our constituents. As a district, we just do NOT feel this is the best way to educate our community.

Higher Education has moved to a tremendous amount of on-line learning for students and adults. Even if you attend a true traditional classroom for higher ed, all higher ed curriculum now require on-line communication with your instructor or classmates. Lack of connectivity in our rural areas eliminate opportunities for those students and adults who wish to further their professional careers due to a connectivity issue.

Students and parents are completing and/or trying to complete the on-line application and scholarship process for our graduating seniors. Imagine trying to do this at another venue instead of your own home where all your paperwork is located to fill out these very complicated on-line platforms from Higher Education.

This is an Equity issue for our state and the Eastern Shore Superintendents Association are glad you are hearing our concerns and look forward to the solutions you come up with.

Thank You