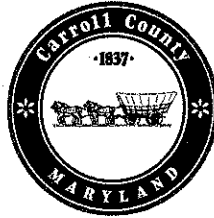


**Board of County
Commissioners**

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Stephen A. Wantz



Carroll County Government

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March 1, 2021

The Honorable Dereck E. Davis, Chair
House Economic Matters Committee
Room 231
House Office Building
Annapolis MD 21401

Re: HB1328 – Economic Development – Broadband Providers – Joint Trenching and Fee - **SUPPORT**

Dear Chair Davis and Members of the Committee,

Carroll County supports HB 1328 as it addresses a priority initiative of Maryland's 24 county jurisdictions. This bill would help to close Maryland's persistent digital divide by enhancing incentives and orchestrating opportunities for broadband deployment across the state.

The pandemic has laid bare the urgent need to fully close the digital divide in rural and underserved areas of the state. Access to stable, reliable, and affordable high-speed internet is an essential component of a county's economic development and the socio-economic advancements of its residents. Residents benefit from increased economic growth, improved labor market access and outcomes, access to better health care, enhanced civic participation, enriched education opportunities, improved quality of life, and overall competitive and vibrant communities.

HB 1328 establishes a statewide "dig once" policy to encourage underground fiber deployment in conjunction with road construction projects. This joint trenching program will provide telecommunication companies a more efficient and expedient process for broadband deployment. The bill also authorizes local governments to adopt local policies to accelerate the deployment of high-speed internet to rural and underserved areas and expresses the intent of the General Assembly that future federal funding decisions prioritize expanding broadband service.

HB 1328 takes an important step in furthering the mutual goal of providing broadband access to all residents and we encourage you to support this important legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael L. Fowler".

Michael L. Fowler
Legislative Liaison, on behalf of the Board of County Commissioners of Carroll County