

House Bill 999

Member-Regulated Cooperatives – Establishment (Rural Broadband for the Eastern Shore Act of 2020)

Before the House Economic Matters Committee

Position - Support

The University of Maryland Medical System (UMMS), a thirteen member hospital health system, supports HB 999. UMMS serves patients across Maryland in urban, suburban and, importantly as it relates to this bill, rural communities, most notably on the Eastern Shore.

Broadband capability is critical to the promise and development of telehealth in communities where access to medical care is challenging, like communities on the Shore. A 2019 report from an Intergovernmental Advisory Committee to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) found broadband access in rural areas is still woefully fragmented. That is as true across the U.S. as it is in Maryland.

The need to increase broadband capabilities in rural Maryland communities has been often considered and recommended. The Workgroup on Rural Health Delivery, created by the Legislature in 2017, noted both the importance of telehealth to rural communities as well as the need to expand broadband access and “last mile” connectivity. Similarly, the Task Force on Rural Internet, Broadband, Wireless, and Cellular Services recommended allowing existing electric utility infrastructure for broadband delivery. HB 999 would move these recommendations forward.

Telehealth is a critically important tool to providing access to patients who reside in more distant locations by proximally bringing care to the patient, whether it is primary or specialty care. It is also an effective mechanism for effectively maximizing the time providers can spend with their patients. But telehealth cannot be effectuated without broadband capacity. Maryland must move proactively in this direction.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on HB 999.

Respectfully submitted,

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