



John Hartline, Chair

50 Harry S. Truman Parkway • Annapolis, MD 21401
Office: 410-841-5772 • Fax: 410-841-5987 • TTY: 800-735-2258
Email: rmc.mda@maryland.gov
Website: www.rural.maryland.gov
Charlotte Davis, Executive Director

POSITION STATEMENT

House Bill 1508 - Information Technology - Communications Lines - Installation
Economic Matters Committee
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The Rural Maryland Council **SUPPORTS** House Bill 1508 - Information Technology - Communications Lines - Installation. This bill requires the Department of Information Technology (DoIT) to waive all fees applicable under its resource sharing agreement (RSA) standard pricing for all “last mile” broadband telecommunications projects in “unserved areas.” The last mile refers to the local Internet connection that physically reaches into the end user’s home, business, or premises. “Unserved area” refers to an area in which no facilities-based broadband service providers offer minimum connectivity speeds of 25 megabits per second to download and 3 megabits per second to upload.

The bill also exempts a private industry entity from having to have a project, including RSAs, reviewed and approved by DoIT if that entity has a separate legal right of access under State or local law to install communications lines and associated facilities in the State rights-of-way, including telephone and cable companies.

The issue of resource-sharing agreements and the Department of Information Technology was discussed by the Task Force for Rural Internet, Broadband, Wireless and Cellular Service after the issuance of a legislative audit and some of the concerns that were raised by the Department of Legislative Services. During the 2019 calendar year, there were some delays in the issuance of permits to providers through the State Highway Administration because of confusion regarding resource-sharing agreements with the Department of Information Technology. In August 2019, the Department of Information Technology released RSA policy guidance on DoIT’s policy implementation of the Resource Sharing Law (“RSL”), Annotated Code of Maryland, State Finance & Procurement Article (“SF&P”) § 3A-307(c), as it applies to certain private industry installation and use of fiber optic cable in State rights-of-way where the user has a separate statutory right to use of and access to the right-of-way.

Broadband is a critical infrastructure for business, education, and agriculture today and access remains a real issue in the state’s rural areas as almost 20% of rural residents lack internet access. SB790 will facilitate the expansion of rural broadband services by streamlining specific processes and waiving associated fees that have greatly impacted broadband projects in the past. The Council respectfully requests your favorable support of HB1508.

The Rural Maryland Council (RMC) brings together citizens, community-based organizations, federal, state, county and municipal government officials as well as representatives of the for-profit and nonprofit sectors to collectively address the needs of Rural Maryland communities. We provide a venue for members of agriculture and natural resource-based industries, health care facilities, educational institutions, economic and community development organizations, for-profit and nonprofit corporations, and government agencies to cross traditional boundaries, share information, and address in a more holistic way the special needs and opportunities in Rural Maryland.

“A Collective Voice for Rural Maryland”