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**SB 540 Member-Regulated Cooperatives – Establishment
(Rural Broadband for the Eastern Shore Act of 2020)**

SUPPORT

Senate Finance

February 25, 2020

Good Afternoon Chairman Kelley and Members of the Senate Finance Committee. I am Tammy Bresnahan. I am the Director of advocacy for AARP MD. As you know, AARP Maryland is one of the largest membership-based organizations in the Free State, encompassing almost 900,000 members. **AARP MD overwhelmingly supports** and we thank Senator Hershey for sponsoring this important legislation **SB 540 Member-Regulated Cooperatives - Establishment (Rural Broadband for the Eastern Shore Act of 2020)**

AARP is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, nationwide organization that helps people turn their goals and dreams into real possibilities, strengthens communities and fights for the issues that matter most to families such as healthcare, employment and income security, retirement planning, affordable utilities and protection from financial abuse.

SB 540 establishes a process for an electric cooperative to operate as a member-regulated cooperative on the Eastern Shore of the State that may provide broadband Internet access to its members.

Throughout the country, AARP actively supports broadband deployment to unserved communities and also supports policies and programs that facilitate broadband adoption. SB 540 furthers the important goal of bringing broadband to areas that are currently on the wrong side of the digital divide. These communities find themselves removed from the information economy because broadband providers traditionally have found it unprofitable to serve them. SB 540 is an important bridge that will help to close the urban-rural digital gap. The bill also includes important consumer protection safeguards, such as prohibiting the sharing of customers' proprietary information.

Electric membership cooperatives, with their long history of serving rural areas, are uniquely positioned to bring broadband internet access to the communities they serve. With SB 540, Maryland's Eastern Shore would join the growing number of states that have carved out an important role for electric cooperatives in bringing a broadband internet ramp to unserved communities, most recently in Tennessee, Mississippi and Georgia.

Real Possibilities