
TESTIMONY
MID-SHORE REGIONAL COUNCIL

TO: SENATOR DELORES G. KELLEY, CHAIR
COMMITTEE: SENATE FINANCE
FROM: MID-SHORE REGIONAL COUNCIL
SUBJECT: SB 540 MEMBER-REGULATED COOPERATIVES – ESTABLISHMENT
(RURAL BROADBAND FOR THE EASTERN SHORE ACT OF 2020)
POSITION: SUPPORT BROADBAND EXPANSION
DATE: FEBRUARY 25, 2020

Dear Madam Chair and Committee Members:

The Mid-Shore Regional Council (MSRC) supports Choptank Electric Cooperative’s efforts to offer broadband service to their customers. Choptank Electric’s desire to create a regional Internet Service Provider has the potential to deliver tremendous impacts to the rural citizens in their service area. The need for such service has been well documented for many years – from students accessing course material from their homes to businesses communicating with customers and supply chains around the globe.

The MSRC operates a cooperative regional planning and development agency within Caroline, Dorchester, and Talbot Counties to foster physical, economic, and social development. The MSRC is an established U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) Economic Development District (EDD). As an EDD the MSRC facilitates and produces the Mid Shore Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS).

Broadband connectivity has been a high priority since the CEDS inception in 2002. The current CEDS document (revised March 7, 2019) Goal 1 states, “Ensure that there is sufficient public infrastructure (e.g. telecommunications, IT, incubators, waste water treatment capability, roads, transportation, education facilities, technology training centers, and public parks) and investment capital to foster the development and prosperity of our existing and new industry clusters.”

To assist in accomplishing this goal the CEDS Action Plan lists under its highest priority the project “Eastern Shore of Maryland Regional Fiber Optic Backbone.” Many entities including the State of Maryland, county and municipal governments, and the MSRC have been instrumental in establishing, developing, and supporting this effort. A major asset that has been developed over the last thirteen years is the Maryland Broadband Cooperative (MDBC). MDBC offers universal, open access to broadband services via a fiber optic network that serves rural Maryland. Over the years, Choptank Electric has partnered with the MDBC to assist in middle mile deployment of fiber optic cable. This partnership has enabled remote locations on the Eastern Shore to have high-speed internet service.

This latest initiative by Choptank Electric will further enhance the opportunity for rural residents of the Eastern Shore to have access to affordable, high-speed broadband service. The MSRC, which comprises state and county elected officials, minority representatives, business representatives, and private citizens, thoroughly understands the importance of this expanded service. The Council looks forward to Choptank Electric’s expansion of broadband service.
