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

Hearing before the Senate Finance Committee

February 25, 2020

Submitted by John Venditta, Administrator, Eastern Shore Regional Library

Dear Chairman Kelley, Vice-Chair Feldman and Distinguished Members of the Committee:
I am writing to support *SB 540* Member-Regulated Cooperatives – Establishment (Rural Broadband for the Eastern Shore Act of 2020).

The bill allows Choptank Electric Cooperative to become a “Member Regulated Cooperative” in order to relieve regulatory and economic hurdles to incentivize broadband deployment to the home.

The public libraries on the Eastern Shore are acutely aware of the importance of broadband opportunities to our citizens. Every year, Eastern Shore residents without access to broadband or with poor bandwidth flock to our institutions to take advantage of our broadband capabilities. Many job services require online applications; taxes need to be filed online; financial and legal documents need to be scanned and emailed; school assignments need to be submitted online. On the Shore, lack of population density presents very little motivation for large for-profit broadband suppliers to invest in new infrastructure, leaving many areas of the Shore with poor broadband coverage.

As the technology has improved, public libraries on the Shore have increasingly added online services to assist our users who live in more remote areas and/or have difficulty leaving their homes. For-profit Internet services can be cost prohibitive to these residents. Without the option provided by this bill, we fear that these library users will lose access to services like ours that provide important connections in their lives.

As the Administrator of the Eastern Shore Regional Library and a resident of the Eastern Shore, I urge the Committee to report favorably on SB540.

Thank you very much for your consideration and continued support of Maryland libraries and the Eastern Shore.

Sincerely,

John C. Venditta
Administrator, Eastern Shore Regional Library, Inc.

