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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES

ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

HB 43 – Department of Information Technology – Office of Broadband and Joint Committee on Broadband

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Delegate Carol L. Krimm

As we have seen during the pandemic, Maryland statewide is lacking in broadband access, broadband affordability, and broadband reliability. In fact, it is reported by the Abell Foundation that nearly 25% of the state does not have reliable access to broadband. Everything we are doing here as a legislature (in a virtual environment) is less transparent to 25% of Marylanders.

In 2017 this Committee and the Maryland General Assembly passed a bill creating the broadband task force for rural Maryland. I served on that task force along with Delegate Mautz and Senator Eckhart. The task force included representatives of the industry – both small and large businesses, local and state government representatives, and elected officials. The task force produced an interim report and final report. There was much useful information gathered and reported on broadband technology and challenges related to access and cost. We learned in that task force that broadband issues go well beyond rural Maryland and the pandemic made that abundantly clear.

HB 43, the bill before you, builds on the task force's work. The bill has three parts:

1. Creates the Office of Broadband that is expanding on the Office of Rural Broadband currently working in the Department of Housing and Community Development. This bill establishes this office in the Office of Information Technology but I would not object to it being located in the Commerce Department. Its mission, goals, and work agenda are the agreed-upon language from the 2017 bill.
2. The bill suggests a funding mechanism that goes beyond state and federal funds that may be available for broadband expansion. I suggest using a portion of the sports betting funding when it becomes available. If we are to achieve the three goals of broadband access, affordability and reliability then we must think in terms of bold initiatives and not get bogged down in policy but create an action plan in conjunction with a properly funded policy that will connect all Marylanders.
3. The bill also provides for legislative oversight. Broadband has reached this level of oversight. We cannot pass a bill and hope that all goes well for broadband expansion. This is too important and must have constant vigilance until our goals are achieved. Legislative oversight can also investigate new technologies that may improve access to broadband

I have heard many times that broadband is a “game-changer” in terms of economic development especially in areas of chronic unemployment. But it is so much more than that post-pandemic. If we are to move forward in the areas of telework, telehealth, and remote learning then it is a necessary infrastructure like roads and transit. Broadband access can provide opportunities for people who may not be able to afford on-campus college experience but could access classes via the internet.

I urge you to move Maryland forward, be bold and join the world of 21st-century technology. Support HB 43. Thank you for your time.