



THE PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT

OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

BILL: Senate Bill 824 – Economic Development –
Broadband Providers – Joint Trenching and Fee
(Building Out Broadband Act of 2021)

SPONSOR: Senator Hestor

HEARING DATE: March 16, 2021

COMMITTEE: Finance

CONTACT: Intergovernmental Affairs Office, 301-780-8411

POSITION: SUPPORT

The Office of the Prince George's County Executive **SUPPORTS Senate Bill 824 – Economic Development – Broadband Providers – Joint Trenching and Fee (Building Out Broadband Act of 2021)**, which addresses Maryland's digital divide by enhancing incentives and orchestrating opportunities for broadband deployment across the state.

The pandemic has laid bare the urgent need to fully close the digital divide in rural and underserved areas of the state. Access to stable, reliable, and affordable high-speed internet is an essential component of a county's economic development and the socio-economic advancements of its residents. Residents benefit from increased economic growth, improved labor market access and outcomes, access to better health care, enhanced civic participation, enriched education opportunities, improved quality of life, and overall competitive and vibrant communities.

HB 1328 establishes a statewide "dig once" policy to encourage underground fiber deployment in conjunction with road construction projects. This joint trenching program will provide telecommunication companies a more efficient and expedient process for broadband deployment. The bill authorizes local governments to adopt local policies to accelerate the deployment of high-speed internet to rural and underserved areas, and expresses the intent of the General Assembly that future federal funding be allocated to expanding broadband service.

The Abell Foundation's "Disconnected in Maryland" report shows that more than 500,000 Maryland households do not currently subscribe to wireline broadband services. MACo and county government stand ready to work with state policy makers to bridge the divide and provide residents the access they need and deserve.

For the reasons stated above, the Office of the Prince George's County Executive strongly **SUPPORTS Senate Bill 824** and asks for a **FAVORABLE** report.