



Peter Franchot
Comptroller

TESTIMONY OF COMPTROLLER PETER FRANCHOT

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

Senate Finance Committee

March 16, 2021

Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman and members of the Committee, it is my pleasure to provide testimony in support of **Senate Bill 824 – Economic Development - Broadband Providers - Joint Trenching and Fee (Building Out Broadband Act of 2021)**. I would like to thank Senator Hester and the Joint Cybersecurity, Information Technology, and Biotechnology Committee for sponsoring this legislation.

Among other impacts, Senate Bill 824 expands the purpose of the Rural Broadband Assistance Fund to focus on the State as a whole, establishes an additional funding mechanism for the fund, and expressly authorizes local governments to adopt policies to extend broadband access to underserved areas.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a spotlight on one of the largest inequalities that exists within our state. The digital divide is a monumental barrier to economic equality, impacting both rural and urban areas, particularly low-income communities where lack of infrastructure and unaffordable Internet service plans are major obstacles.

As tens of thousands of students returned to school virtually this year, we've seen how the digital gap has further disrupted the education of Maryland children, making it all the more difficult to learn and succeed in already trying circumstances.

For the reasons stated above, I respectfully request a favorable report for Senate Bill 824. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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