



## Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council

EMPOWERMENT • OPPORTUNITY • INCLUSION

### Finance Committee

### **SB 824: Economic Development – Broadband Providers – Joint Trenching and Fee (Building Out Broadband Act of 2021)**

**March 16, 2021**

**Position: Support**

The Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council (DD Council) has invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in broadband and technology access since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes getting technology into the hands of some of Maryland's most underserved citizens. The Council was on the frontline in addressing the emergent need of students and families last year as remote schooling became a reality. Access to internet is critical for all people, including people with developmental disabilities, and **the DD Council supports SB 824.**

#### **WHY is this legislation important?**

- Access to reliable, high-quality broadband Internet service at an affordable price is important to all Marylanders, including people with disabilities.
- Maryland's citizens with developmental disabilities want and need to participate in everyday activities online.
- This bill helps to ensure affordable, reliable internet access for all regardless of zip code or income level.
- With greater access, people can communicate with family, a healthcare professional, a bank, or arrange a grocery delivery, among other things.
- Services and supports for people with developmental disabilities, via the Developmental Disabilities Administration can be provided remotely and online.

#### **WHAT does this legislation do?**

- Among other things, it declares that it is the finding of the General Assembly that broadband access is essential.
- Renames the Rural Broadband Assistance Fund to be the Maryland Digital Connectivity Fund.
- Fundamentally shifts the purpose of the Fund to focus on affordable access to broadband.
- Provides a direct funding source and authorizes local grants for at-need populations.
- Establishes procedures for the expansion of broadband infrastructure.

**The additional access the internet afforded by SB 824 is essential so people with developmental disabilities can access remote services and supports, telehealth, remain connected to family and friends, and be able to fully participate in a variety of activities.**

Contact: Keith Walmsley, Director of Public Policy Initiatives  
kwalmsley@md-council.org