



March 16, 2021

Senate Bill 824

Economic Development – Broadband Providers – Joint Trenching and Fee (Building Out Broadband Act of 2021)

Position: FAVORABLE

The Anne Arundel County Administration **SUPPORTS** Senate Bill 824 - Economic Development – Broadband Providers – Joint Trenching and Fee (Building Out Broadband Act of 2021). This bill would help close Maryland’s persistent 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.

SB 824 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 also 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 decisions prioritize expanding broadband service.

Accordingly, Anne Arundel County respectfully requests a **FAVORABLE** report on Senate Bill 824.