

SB 824 - PGCEX - FAV.pdf

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Position: FAV



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.

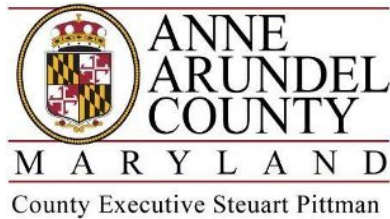
The Abell Foundation's "Disconnected in Maryland" report shows that more than 500,000 Maryland households do not currently subscribe to wireline broadband services. MACo and county government stand ready to work with state policy makers to bridge the divide and provide residents the access they need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

Anne Arundel County_FAV_ SB824.pdf

Uploaded by: Baron, Peter

Position: FAV



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.

SB 824 Economic Development – Broadband Providers

Uploaded by: Bresnahan, Tammy

Position: FAV



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**SB 824 Economic Development – Broadband Providers – Joint Trenching
and Fee (Building Out Broadband Act of 2021)
FAVORABLE
Senate Finance Committee
March 16, 2021**

Good Afternoon Chairwoman Kelley and Members of the Senate Finance Committee. I am Tammy Bresnahan. I am the Director of Advocacy for AARP MD. AARP Maryland is one of the largest membership-based organizations, encompassing almost 850,000 members. AARP MD overwhelmingly supports **SB 824 Economic Development – Broadband Providers – Joint Trenching and Fee (Building Out Broadband Act of 2021)**. We thank Senator Hester for sponsoring this very important bill.

AARP is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, nationwide organization that helps people turn their goals and dreams into real possibilities, strengthens communities and fights for the issues that matter most to families such as healthcare, employment and income security, retirement planning, affordable utilities and protection from financial abuse.

AARP MD supports SB 824 because it expands the uses for which broadband funds can be used to cover both gaps in either rural or urban broadband availability, plus other worthy objectives such as distance learning, telework, and telehealth. The provisions with regard to "trenching" also are a plus in this bill.

SB 824 also renames and revises the purpose and uses for the broadband fund which is administered by the Department of Commerce. A fund previously established under the name "Rural Broadband Assistance Fund" will now be the "Maryland Digital Connectivity Fund." The fund is administered by the Department of Commerce. The purpose of the fund has been revised in apparent recognition that gaps in the availability of broadband are not exclusively a rural problem and not solely a problem of deployment. The purpose of the Fund is to assist in the establishment and expansion of affordable broadband communication services in the State.

The uses for which the fund may be used have also been expanded and include the following:

- for planning, construction, and maintenance of broadband communication services and equipment and related activities;

AARP
Real Possibilities

- to provide financial assistance in the form of grants to authorities to expand high-speed internet access in underserved areas of the state;
- to facilitate distance learning, including technological improvement for distance learning;
- to establish telemedicine services in underserved areas of the state;
- to improve telework capabilities for employees to enable compliance with COVID-19 public health precautions; and to
- Support businesses by providing better access to high-speed internet.

Rather than attempting to be prescriptive about how the available funds are distributed, the bill directs the Department to adopt procedures for "authorities" to apply for financial assistance from the fund and priorities for allocating/selecting/distributing funds. The bill requires the Department to submit an annual report to the Governor and the General Assembly on the status of the fund and recommendations for future funding sources for the fund.

Although the purpose of the bill mentions affordability as an objective, we might suggest that you consider a provision that would specifically support awarding funds to subsidize the price of broadband for low-income households.

The bill also provides for trenching access by broadband providers and fees. It requires that broadband providers have access to "trenching" to state and local roads; it directs adoption of regulations for charging a fee to a broadband provider for joint trenching. Also new is that fees paid for access to the state's Department of Transportation would be transferred to the broadband fund.

AARP MD supports SB 824 because the benefits of broadband internet access to older adults are well-recognized. Affordable, reliable internet access helps older adults age in place productively and safely with a higher quality of life than would otherwise exist. The broadband platform supports access to telehealth and telemedicine, civic engagement, entertainment, on-line learning and other internet-based applications that address isolation and health challenges for the 50 Plus.

For these reasons, AARP supports SB 824 and respectfully request the Senate Finance Committee issue a favorable committee report. For questions, please contact Tammy Bresnahan tbresnahan@aarp.org or by calling 410-302-8451.

Comptroller's testimony on SB 824.pdf

Uploaded by: Franchot, Comptroller

Position: FAV



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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SB 824 - Sponsor Amendments

Uploaded by: Fry Hester, Katie

Position: FAV



SB0824/923020/1

AMENDMENTS
PREPARED
BY THE
DEPT. OF LEGISLATIVE
SERVICES

16 MAR 21
08:44:08

BY: Senator Hester

(To be offered in the Finance Committee)

AMENDMENTS TO SENATE BILL 824

(First Reading File Bill)

AMENDMENT NO. 1

On page 1, strike beginning with “renaming” in line 5 down through “date;” in line 10; strike beginning with “altering” in line 12 down through “Board;” in line 13; strike beginning with “authorizing” in line 15 down through “manner;” in line 22 and substitute “requiring the Department of Transportation to coordinate certain review of certain trenching with the Washington Suburban Sanitary District under certain circumstances; requiring certain revenues to be distributed and used in a certain manner;”; and in line 23, after “regulations” insert “on or before a certain date; requiring the State to appropriate certain funds for a certain purpose, to the extent practicable”.

On page 2, strike in their entirety lines 3 and 4 and substitute “Section 5–1101 and 5–1103”; strike in their entirety lines 7 through 11, inclusive; and strike line 23 in its entirety.

AMENDMENT NO. 2

On pages 3 through 5, strike in their entirety the lines beginning with line 15 on page 3 through line 13 on page 5, inclusive.

On page 5, in line 15, before “A” insert “(A)”; and after line 28, insert:

“(B) FOR A COUNTY OR MUNICIPAL CORPORATION WITHIN THE WASHINGTON SUBURBAN SANITARY COMMISSION’S JURISDICTION, THE POLICIES ADOPTED UNDER SUBSECTION (A) OF THIS SECTION SHALL PROVIDE FOR REVIEW BY THE WASHINGTON SUBURBAN SANITARY COMMISSION OF TRENCHING PLANS TO PREVENT WATER AND SEWER LINE CONFLICTS BEFORE A PERMIT IS ISSUED.”.

(Over)

On pages 5 and 6, strike in their entirety the lines beginning with line 29 on page 5 through line 11 on page 6, inclusive.

On page 7 in line 1, strike “(2)” and substitute “(3)”; in line 7, after “(2)” insert “WITHIN THE WASHINGTON SUBURBAN SANITARY DISTRICT’S JURISDICTION, THE DEPARTMENT, OR A UNIT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT SHALL COORDINATE REVIEW OF JOINT TRENCHING WITH THE WASHINGTON SUBURBAN SANITARY DISTRICT.

(3)”;

in the same line, after “DEPARTMENT” insert “, THE WASHINGTON SUBURBAN SANITARY DISTRICT,”; in line 15, strike “(3)” and substitute “(4)”; strike beginning with “THE” in line 21 down through “ARTICLE” in line 23 and substitute “REVENUES GENERATED FROM FEES CHARGED BY THE DEPARTMENT UNDER THIS SECTION SHALL BE EVENLY DISTRIBUTED ACROSS FUNDS DESIGNED FOR INVESTMENT IN BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE.

(IV) REVENUES GENERATED FROM FEES CHARGED BY A UNIT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNDER THIS SECTION SHALL BE USED TO IMPROVE BROADBAND ACCESS AND ADOPTION WITHIN THAT JURISDICTION”;

and strike in their entirety lines 24 through 34, inclusive.

On page 7, in line 17, after “TRENCHING” insert “ON REASONABLE FINANCIAL TERMS”.

On page 8, in lines 1 and 4, strike “**(E)**” and “**(F)**”, respectively, and substitute “**(D)**” and “**(E)**”, respectively; in line 6, after “**TRENCHING**” insert “**ON REASONABLE FINANCIAL TERMS**”;

after line 6, insert:

“SECTION 3. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That, to the extent practicable, the State shall appropriate federal funding for the purpose of improving broadband access and adoption.”;

and in line 7, strike “3.” and substitute “**4.**”.

SB0824 - 03.16.21-- Broadband Providers - Joint Tr

Uploaded by: Fry, Donald

Position: FAV



TESTIMONY PRESENTED TO THE SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE

**SENATE BILL 824 – ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT - BROADBAND PROVIDERS –
JOINT TRENCHING AND FEE (BUILDING OUT BROADBAND ACT OF 2021)**

Sponsor: Senator Hester (Chair, Joint Cybersecurity, Information Technology, and Biotechnology Committee)

March 16, 2021

**DONALD C. FRY
PRESIDENT & CEO
GREATER BALTIMORE COMMITTEE**

Position: Support

The Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC) supports Senate Bill 824, which would rename the Rural Broadband Assistance Fund to the Maryland Digital Connectivity Fund and alter the purpose of the Fund to include expansion of affordable broadband services. The bill would provide financial assistance in the form of grants to expand high-speed internet access in underserved areas of the state, in addition to allowing a county or municipal corporation to adopt locally appropriate policies to expand broadband access to underserved areas. Also, the bill would allow joint trenching by broadband providers and adopt regulations for the implementation of a trenching fee.

Technology continues to develop at an exponential rate and digital access is an essential part of education, health care, workforce development, and business operations. The coronavirus pandemic has made fair and equitable access to the Internet more important than ever. But it has also exposed major disparities regarding high-speed, reliable broadband home access among Marylanders:

- 18 % of all Maryland households do not have a laptop or desktop computer at home.
- 8,900 households in Baltimore City lack even a smartphone with broadband internet speeds.

It is even more alarming when you look at the breakdown of these statistics:

- 40% of the Marylanders who lack wireline broadband services are African American (African Americans comprise about 30% of the state's population).
- 75% of White households have wired broadband access compared to just half of African-American households.
- 75% of White households have wired broadband access compared to less than half of Hispanic households.

It is incumbent upon the State of Maryland to ensure that all citizens have an opportunity to learn, work, and access health care. Marylanders should not be precluded from essential services just because of where they live. A statewide plan to ensure that all residents have the ability to connect to reliable broadband Internet allows us to address those challenges.

Senate Bill 824 would be a significant step forward in securing reliable broadband internet service for all Marylanders. It alters and expands the purpose of the Rural Broadband Assistance Fund to encompass

GREATER BALTIMORE COMMITTEE

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providing grants to expand high speed internet access. This will facilitate distance learning, establish telemedicine services in underserved areas, improve telework capabilities, and support businesses' internet needs. Furthermore, it empowers local jurisdictions to take steps to expand broadband service in their own underserved communities. This bill authorizes joint trenching by broadband providers on a nonexclusive and nondiscriminatory basis, except in cases where trenching will disrupt highway infrastructure, or water, sewer, and gas and electric lines.

In the Greater Baltimore Committee report *Gaining the Competitive Edge: Keys to Economic Growth and Job Creation in Maryland*, eight core pillars were identified for a competitive business environment. An essential pillar is a highly educated and trained workforce to meet Maryland's business needs. Reliable broadband service is key to ensuring that workforce.

SB 824 is also consistent with the Greater Baltimore Committee's [2021 Legislative Priorities](#), as shown in the table below.

Greater Baltimore Committee 2021 Legislative Priority	Why SB 824 Helps Achieve the Legislative Priority
Advocate for solutions to accelerate economic recovery for small and minority owned businesses	Economic recovery is dependent upon providing businesses access to all available resources to allow them to be competitive
Advocate for inclusive policies that strengthen economic competitiveness and job creation	A competitive market, and thus a strong economy, cannot exist when high speed internet is unavailable in certain geographic areas
Strengthen education and workforce systems to prioritize equity, accountability, and alignment with Maryland's high-growth industry sectors	High speed internet connection is an essential component of student success and workforce systems, and low-income and minority individuals are disproportionately impacted by the lack of a coherent plan for broadband in Maryland.

For these reasons, the Greater Baltimore Committee urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 824.

The Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC) is a non-partisan, independent, regional business advocacy organization comprised of hundreds of businesses -- large, medium and small -- educational institutions, nonprofit organizations and foundations located in Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Carroll, Harford, and Howard counties as well as Baltimore City. The GBC is a 66-year-old, private-sector membership organization with a rich legacy of working with government to find solutions to problems that negatively affect our competitiveness and viability.

SB 824 Supported by Commissioners St. Mary's Co..p

Uploaded by: Guy, Randy

Position: FAV

ST. MARY'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT
**COMMISSIONERS OF
ST. MARY'S COUNTY**



James R. Guy, President
Eric Colvin, Commissioner
Michael L. Hewitt, Commissioner
Todd B. Morgan, Commissioner
John E. O'Connor, Commissioner

Senate Bill 824

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

Hearing: March 16, 2021

SUPPORT

March 9, 2021

Senator Delores G. Kelley
Senate Finance Committee
3 East
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401


Re: **SB 824** - Economic Development - Broadband Providers - Joint Trenching and Fee (Building Out Broadband Act of 2021) - Hearing: March 16, 2021

Dear Chairman Kelley:

The Commissioners of St. Mary's County **SUPPORT** SB 824 - Economic Development - Broadband Providers - Joint Trenching and Fee (Building Out Broadband Act of 2021) which is being heard on March 16, 2021 in the Finance Committee.

We request a favorable report on SB824. We support the introduction of this legislation and believe it would benefit the citizens of St. Mary's County. Thank you for your consideration as well as your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,
COMMISSIONERS OF ST. MARY'S COUNTY


James Randy Guy, President

CSMC/AB/sf
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Page 2

Senator Delores G. Kelley

March 9, 2021

Cc: Senator Jack Bailey

Delegate Matthew Morgan

Delegate Gerald Clark

Delegate Brian Crosby

Commissioner Eric Colvin

Commissioner Michael Hewitt

Commissioner Todd Morgan

Commissioner John O'Connor

Dr. Rebecca Bridgett, County Administrator

David Weiskopf, County Attorney

SB0824-FIN_MACo_SUP.pdf

Uploaded by: Jabin, Drew

Position: FAV



Senate Bill 824

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

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Finance Committee

Date: March 16, 2021

From: Drew Jabin

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** SB 824 as it addresses a priority initiative of Maryland's 24 county jurisdictions.

This bill would help to 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.

The Abell Foundation's "Disconnected in Maryland" report, from this year, 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.

SB 824 takes an important step in furthering the mutual goal of providing broadband access to all residents and accordingly, MACo **SUPPORTS** SB 824 and requests a **FAVORABLE** report.

SB 824_FAV_MML.pdf

Uploaded by: Jorch, Bill

Position: FAV



Maryland Municipal League

The Association of Maryland's Cities and Towns

TESTIMONY

March 16, 2021

Committee: Senate Finance

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

Position: Support

Reason for Position:

The Maryland Municipal League supports SB 824 which, through a few mechanisms, seeks to enhance the deployment of broadband Internet service.

In addition to reconstituting a fund for broadband projects and allowing local governments to advance projects through local policies, the bill takes a unique approach to incentivize Internet deployment by reducing installment capital costs through joint trenching.

By allowing multiple providers to install hardwire Internet infrastructure along the same stretch of right-of-way at the same time, several priorities are achieved:

- Broader Internet coverage area,
- increased consumer choice, and
- a reduction in inconvenience as the right-of-way is only disrupted once.

Understanding the importance of broader Internet deployment, we respectfully request that the committee provide a favorable report on SB 824.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

Scott A. Hancock	Executive Director
Angelica Bailey	Director, Government Relations
Bill Jorch	Director, Research and Policy Analysis
Justin Fiore	Manager, Government Relations

1212 West Street, Annapolis, Maryland 21401

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SB 824.pdf

Uploaded by: May, Lisa

Position: FAV



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

Position: Support

Maryland REALTORS® support SB 824, which establishes a joint trenching process and fee to provide additional funding for the Maryland Digital Connectivity Fund.

REALTORS® share the view that high-speed internet is necessary to maintaining Maryland's economic competitiveness and quality of life. It is also a crucial tool for housing Maryland's residents. In addition to work, school and tele-medicine, consumers increasingly use online services for at least a part of the home buying or selling process. Thanks to modern technology, some buyers even completed their home purchase online during the pandemic, without ever setting foot inside the dwelling.

Even before the current pandemic restrictions, many REALTORS® have experienced buyers cancelling a home purchase because the property lacked access to high-speed internet. Those properties lose on average 3-6% of their value because of this one feature, and it prevents Marylanders from moving to more rural parts of the state. This leaves buyers with even fewer viable and affordable housing options at a time of already historically low housing inventory.

SB 824 is a tool to help close the broadband access gap in Maryland. REALTORS® recommend a favorable report.

**For more information, contact bill.castelli@mdrealtor.org,
susan.mitchell@mdrealtor.org, or lisa.may@mdrealtor.org**

MRHA SB824 - Economic Development - Broadband Prov

Uploaded by: Orosz, Samantha

Position: FAV



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association

To the Finance Committee

March 16, 2021

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

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, Senator Hester, and members of the Finance Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 824 Economic Development – Broadband Providers – Joint Trenching and Fee (Building Out Broadband Act of 2021).

MRHA supports this legislation that establishes the purpose of the Maryland Digital Connectivity Fund to include expansion of affordable broadband services provide financial assistance to authorities to expand high-speed Internet access in certain areas of the State.

Rural Maryland faces many unique challenges compared to the rest of the state, including deteriorating infrastructure, economical and broadband issues. This fund would provide greatly needed initiatives and solutions to address broadband infrastructure and economic situations across rural Maryland.

Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic where rural communities depend on reliable broadband for school, work, and health care, this bill would provide essential financial assistance and expansion of broadband to rural areas in need.

MRHA's mission is to educate and advocate for the optimal health and wellness of rural communities and their residents. Membership is comprised of health departments, hospitals, community health centers, health professionals, and community members in rural Maryland.

Rural Maryland represents almost 80 percent of Maryland's land area and 25% of its population. Of Maryland's 24 counties, 18 are considered rural by the state, and with a population of over 1.6 million they differ greatly from the urban areas in the state. And while Maryland is one of the richest states, there is great disparity in how wealth is distributed. The greatest portion of wealth resides around the Baltimore/Washington Region; while further away from the I-95 corridor, differences in the social and economic environment are very apparent.

MHRA believes this legislation is important to support our rural communities and we thank you for your consideration.

Lara Wilson, Executive Director, larawilson@mdruralhealth.org, 410-693-6988

SB0824_Broadband_MLC_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Plante, Cecilia

Position: FAV



TESTIMONY FOR SB0824
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT – BROADBAND PROVIDERS – JOINT TRENCHING AND FEE
(BUILDING OUT BROADBAND ACT OF 2021)

Bill Sponsor: Senator Hester

Committee: Finance

Organization Submitting: Maryland Legislative Coalition

Person Submitting: Cecilia Plante, co-chair

Position: **FAVORABLE**

I am submitting this testimony in favor of SB0824 on behalf of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. The Maryland Legislative Coalition is an association of individuals and grassroots groups with members in every district in the state. We have over 30,000 members across the state.

Maryland needs broadband for everyone. We cannot educate our children or compete effectively in business without it.

We strongly support the idea of a Digital Connectivity Fund as well as the idea of joint trenching. We cannot do this fast enough.

The Maryland Legislative Coalition supports this bill and we recommend a **FAVORABLE** report in Committee.

SB0824_MACC_FAV_B.Sadusky.pdf

Uploaded by: Sadusky, Dr. Bernard

Position: FAV



Senate Finance Committee
TESTIMONY

Submitted by Dr. Bernard J. Sadusky, Executive Director

March 16, 2021

BILL: SB0824 – Economic Development – Broadband Providers – Joint Trenching and Fee
(Building Out Broadband Act of 2021)

POSITION: Support

The Maryland Association of Community Colleges, representing all of Maryland's 16 community colleges, strongly support SB0824, Economic Development – Broadband Providers – Joint Trenching and Fee (Building Out Broadband Act of 2021). Equity and inclusion and the digital divide have been problems prior to our global pandemic and ones that will continue to persist after the pandemic is over if the State does not act now to put in place the necessary infrastructure to make a change.

The COVID-19 impact has heightened how critical it is for our State and our communities to have reliable internet access. This has become a major clarion call for taking action. The Pew Research Center's most recent poll conducted in early April of 2020 reveals that 22 percent of families do not have reliable internet access and must use public Wi-Fi to finish their schoolwork. Maryland's community colleges have also experienced the lack of connectivity for students enrolled in our colleges. In response, the community colleges have set up public Wi-Fi hotspots in parking lots on campus so students can drive to the college and complete their assignments. The pandemic has exposed, almost overnight, how essential fast and reliable internet is for the productivity of our State and for our entire educational pipeline.

Racial inequalities also have impacted access to digital connectivity. This has tremendous ramifications for students of color and on economic opportunities as it can result in diminishing educational attainment levels. As our society shifts and changes, the State can no longer acquiesce to something that has become as fundamental to our productivity and educational goals.

MACC fully supports this legislation as a first step in addressing the long-term impacts of having a digital divide.

SB 824 Digital Divide.pdf

Uploaded by: Walmsley, Keith

Position: FAV



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

SB824 – Economic Development – Broadband Providers

Uploaded by: Davis, Charlotte

Position: FWA

Testimony in Support of
Senate Bill 824 – Economic Development – Broadband Providers – Joint Trenching and Fee (Building
Out Broadband Act of 2021)
Finance Committee
March 16, 2021

The Rural Maryland Council **supports with amendments** Senate Bill 824. The bill would rename the Rural Broadband Assistance Fund to the Maryland Digital Connectivity Fund, , alter the use of the Fund to include providing certain financial assistance to authorities to expand high-speed Internet access in certain areas of the State, allow joint trenching by broadband providers with the permission of local units of government and the Department of Transportation, and authorizing the Department of Transportation, and units of local government under certain circumstances, to charge a fee to certain broadband providers for joint trenching

The Council's 2020 Rural Issues survey found the lack of broadband to be the greatest concern in rural Maryland. Having access to fast and reliable internet has become increasingly essential over the past several years and even more so during the recent months of the pandemic. Many children must now rely on the internet to attend class and complete schoolwork, and many adults are now working from home. Other services such as telehealth visits have also become more popular during this time, allowing patients to have medical examinations administered from the safety of their homes. In a time of growing dependency on technology, these trends are certain to continue after the end of the pandemic.

Allowing joint trenching would help expand broadband across the state. By allowing broadband wires to be installed along trenches underground it would provide more options for households to be wired to broadband internet. Joint trenching would also be providing a safer means of delivery. By placing wires underground, there is no longer as much risk of human interference, such as someone wrecking into a pole, or damage and interference from the elements, such as lightening, ice, wind, or trees falling on the wires.

According to the Technical Guide to Dig Once Policies April 2017 released by ctc Technology and Engineering, requiring simultaneous underground construction and co-location of broadband infrastructure can reduce the cost of broadband installation. The price of fiber optic cables and conduit will only result in roughly a quarter of the cost of new construction or less than \$40,000 per mile, while the costs coming from labor, permitting and engineering results in a total fiber construction cost of almost \$200,000 per mile for standalone projects. Because underground construction is already taking place and more than one entity will be using the area at a time, coordinated construction efforts result in less costs of labor and materials compared to standalone projects. Other cost reductions include engineering and surveying, permits, traffic control, leasing access to private easements, and trenching or boring. Additionally, with an increase in infrastructure work on the nation's roads and highways, there will be more opportunities for the implementation of broadband networks through joint trenching.

The Council suggests that the fee to providers for joint trenching be removed from the bill and a summer study be conducted on the potential fees to the providers. This is to assure that no unintentional costs will be passed onto the buyers.

We ask that the bill be amended to be consistent with Senate Bill 66 and that the Committee strike the renaming of the Rural Broadband Assistance Fund. This Fund has provided grants to local jurisdictions for construction and infrastructure projects related to broadband and is available to receive federal funds. Keeping the fund will also show to potential funders the State's support of rural broadband expansion.

The rural Maryland Council respectfully asks for a **favorable with amendments** report on Senate Bill 824.

The Rural Maryland Council (RMC) is an independent state agency governed by a nonpartisan, 40-member board that consists of inclusive representation from the federal, state, regional, county and municipal governments, as well as the for-profit and nonprofit sectors. We bring together federal, state, county and municipal government officials as well as representatives of the for-profit and nonprofit sectors to identify challenges unique to rural communities and to craft public policy, programmatic or regulatory solutions.

"A Collective Voice for Rural Maryland"

SB0824 - SHA - Broadband Providers - LOI_FINAL.pdf

Uploaded by: Westervelt, Patricia

Position: INFO

March 16, 2021

The Honorable Delores G. Kelley
Chair, Senate Finance Committee
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis MD 21401

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

Dear Chair Kelley and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) takes no position on Senate Bill 824 but offers the following information for the Committee's consideration.

Senate Bill 824 renames the Rural Broadband Assistance Fund as the Maryland Digital Connectivity Fund (MDCF) and declares the intent of the General Assembly regarding broadband and connectivity. Specifically, Senate Bill 824 requires MDOT and MDOT State Highway Administration (MDOT SHA) to allow "joint trenching" by broadband providers on a nonexclusive and nondiscriminatory basis with some exceptions.

Some considerations to Senate Bill 824 that would help clarify the proposed requirements and better streamline the process for MDOT include:

- Expanding the broadband deployment method listed from "joint trenching" to any underground construction method. Broadband deployment may also occur on infrastructure above ground or other below ground placement technology.
- Clarifying the hierarchy of statutes and requirements MDOT must follow in these instances (such as those concerning Resource Sharing Requirements).
- Requirements of additional companies looking to be in Joint Build may delay the originating request.

The Maryland Department of Transportation respectfully requests the Committee consider this information when deliberating Senate Bill 824.

Respectfully Submitted,

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