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February 14, 2023

Delegate Vanessa E. Atterbeary:
131 Taylor House Office Building
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Delegate Atterbeary:

The Multicultural Media, Telecom and Internet Council (MMTC) appreciates the opportunity to express strong support for HB551, the “Broadband Expansion Incentive Act of 2023.” This legislation is the centerpiece of Governor Wes Moore’s effort to expand and improve broadband coverage throughout of the state and to improve Maryland’s economic competitiveness.

MMTC is the technology, media, and telecommunications industries’ leading non-partisan, national nonprofit diversity organization. For nearly four decades, MMTC has worked tirelessly to promote and preserve equal opportunity, civil rights, and social justice in the mass media, telecommunications, and broadband industries, and to close the digital divide on behalf of its members and constituents. Increasing broadband access for unserved communities – including the more than 30 percent each of Black, Latinx, and Tribal communities, many of whom live in rural areas, that still lack reliable, high-speed connectivity – is core to MMTC’s mission.

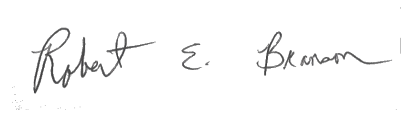
The federal government is providing a “once in a lifetime” investment in expanding broadband service in rural and underserved areas which will help the nation to bridge the digital divide. With at least \$100 million in federal funding expected to be allocated to Maryland, HB551 would allow those federal dollars to go further, as well as leverage new private sector investment in broadband networks. It would put Maryland on par with competing states in our region by changing tax policies that increase the cost of network investment.

The lack of broadband availability across our country has disproportionately burdened communities of color, particularly those living in rural areas. The Federal government has stepped up to the challenge so now it is dependent upon the states to do likewise. We can hurtle toward a future in which we can finally provide the digital access that we know is a prerequisite for economic mobility and educational opportunity and so much more for our communities.

On behalf of MMTC and all citizens and businesses of Maryland, we urge you to vote in favor of HB551. As a resident of the state, I also am personally and particularly concerned that my state will do its best to make opportunities available and work hard to help close the digital divide which exists.

We look forward to working with you to guarantee these extraordinary federal broadband funds are used to connect the communities in Maryland and that the legislature takes steps to make the money go further so that all Marylanders will have access to affordable, high-speed internet.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert E. Branson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a vertical line at the end.

Robert Branson, Esq.
President and CEO