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February 11, 2025

To: Environment & Transportation Committee

Re: **Opposition to H.B. 626, Real Estate Development and Highway Rights-of-Way –  
Installation of Broadband Micro Conduits and Microducts**

Choptank Electric Cooperative and our broadband subsidiary, Choptank Fiber respectfully urge you to reject the provisions of **H.B. 626** that would put the security of our electric grid in jeopardy and would dramatically increase the cost of installing high-speed internet to unserved families on Maryland's Eastern Shore.

The provisions of the bill that start on page 2, line 14 would require a buried fiber optic cable installed in a highway right-of-way to include conduit containing at least 7 microducts, which could then be made available to other broadband companies by the DOT or a local government, and for which government could recover a fee.

The costs to Choptank Electric Cooperative and Choptank Fiber would increase exponentially. The conduit we currently use for construction costs about \$4,000 per mile. Our supplier quoted us \$32,000 for a mile of the conduit required under this bill. This is not a cost the members of Choptank Electric Cooperative or the customers of Choptank Fiber can absorb. There are no provisions in the bill to fund this expense.

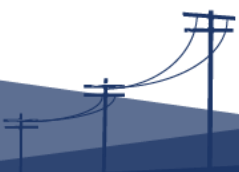
Our additional concern, and it is significant, is the security of our electric grid. Our backbone and middle mile fiber are used to connect and operate our electric substations. Allowing state and local government to give access to that fiber through a joined section of conduit presents a security risk.

Current law already provides for joint trenching for broadband companies seeking to place fiber when ROWs are being opened for another provider. And the Maryland Broadband Cooperative provides controlled and secure opportunities for fiber access for companies with that need.

For these reasons, we urge you to give H.B. 626 an unfavorable report.

*For more information contact:*

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