TO:	Senate Budget and Tax and House Ways and Means Committees
FROM:	Dee Anna Sobczak, ThinkBig Networks
DATE:	February 18, 2025
RE:	Support for SB 774/HB 969

Good afternoon, my name is Dee Anna Sobczak and I am the SVP & GM Manager of ThinkBig Networks. We are an internet service provider deploying service in rural counties and small suburban communities in Maryland. Here in Maryland, we have many areas that are either rural or somehow disadvantaged that don't have access to high-speed internet, which is crucial today.

Maryland realized there was no business model that could support these builds and other inequalities and created the Office of Statewide broadband. Through these programs, broadband providers partner with the not only State, but the Counties and towns to help close this digital divide and bring the provider's capital commitment to a model that is sustainable.

As an unregulated utility we are required to report our total build cost annually to SDAT through the Public Utility Operating Property Return. The problem with this is the filing doesn't take the subsidy into consideration and the provider is being assessed at a property value much higher than is warranted. In some Counties, ThinkBig is being assessed a property tax bill that is more than 50% higher than our total revenues. We believe this is an unintended consequence and is not sustainable for the provider. There also is not a way to pass this expense through to the consumer, because in many cases they are already financially disadvantaged.

We tried to work with our County partners that wanted to help with this problem, possibly through a PILOT program, but their hands were tied because current law doesn't allow for PILOT Programs for broadband providers.

We are requesting that the State allow the Counties to adopt PILOT Programs with Broadband providers as needed so they can ensure that all Maryland residents have access to this critical infrastructure.

For more information contact Mike Johansen at RWL Law – 410-269-5066