



## **Senate Bill 540**

*Member-Regulated Cooperatives – Establishment  
(Rural Broadband for the Eastern Shore Act of 2020)*

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Finance Committee

Date: February 25, 2020

From: Drew Jabin

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** SB 540. This bill will promote broadband internet access for rural communities on the Eastern Shore by allowing Choptank Electric Cooperative to become member-regulated. This will strengthen and protect rural residents by allowing the Cooperative to make decisions concerning services such as broadband without additional regulation by the Maryland Public Service Commission.

In 2019, the Maryland General Assembly authorized the use of existing electric service easements and rights-of-way to deliver broadband fiber; SB 540 is the sensible next step to bringing internet access to rural communities on the Eastern Shore.

Eastern Shore counties have so much to offer to the economic growth and development of Maryland and this bill will allow access for underserved areas to reach a higher potential of engagement by providing high speed fiber internet. Enabling more opportunities such as virtual workforces, distance learning, and telemedicine will only contribute to the strength and engagement of Maryland residents.

A solution such as offered in SB 540 is long overdue, and Maryland's Eastern Shore counties should not have to wait any longer to have the ability to access high speed internet and grow local economies.

This legislation will help bridge the digital divide in Maryland by relieving regulatory and economic hurdles to incentivize broadband deployment. Accordingly, MACo urges the Committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** report on SB 540.