



**Choptank Electric
Cooperative**
A Touchstone Energy
Cooperative

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Support w/Amendment – HB 97 – DHCD – Office of Digital Inclusion - Established

Dear Chairman Davis and Members of the Committee:

I am testifying on behalf of our 54,000 co-op members on Maryland's Eastern Shore urging support for legislation to codify the state office of broadband and continue critical funding for rural internet infrastructure development.

As you know, Choptank Electric Cooperative (CEC) diversified over the last few months to provide broadband service for our members. The Economic Matters Committee and the Eastern Shore Delegation were instrumental in allowing Choptank members to move in this direction.

As we begin the monumental task of connecting homes and businesses in the most rural areas on the Shore to broadband service, we rely heavily on the advice, expertise and funding support provided by the Office of Rural Broadband, and its Director, Rick Gordon.

CEC supports HB 97 with amendments to assure the commitment to rural infrastructure develop continues to be a primary focus of the office. Specifically, Choptank recommends, on page 8, at line 9 inserting a new SECTION 5, to read:

SECTION 5. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That nothing in this Act shall reduce the annual allocation of funds for rural broadband infrastructure expansion under the Office or the discretion of the Director to implement future programs for rural broadband infrastructure expansion.

CEC also supports amendments that have been offered by the Rural Maryland Council to streamline the functions of the Office even as the mandate is expanded to include statewide programming. We believe the granular mapping directive may be duplicative of an effort that will be undertaken by the Federal Communications Commission in the near term.

Overall, we **support HB 97 with amendments** and urge the Committee to codify the important role of the Office of Broadband.

Sincerely,

VALERIE T. CONNELLY
Vice President of Government Affairs & PR
Choptank Electric Cooperative



Members First. Every Day.