DocuSign Envelope ID: 39F61E60-7BA7-4E3B-95C6-AA756C82B43B

Howard County
MARYLAND

August 12, 2022

Honorable Gina M. Raimondo
Secretary of Commerce
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Raimondo,

County Executive Calvin Ball, Chief Information Officer Brandee Ganz and Howard County, Maryland's Digital Equity Work Group support the application of Baltimore Gas and Electric (BGE) for funding for its *Connect Community – Middle Mile* project through the U.S. Department of Commerce/National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) "Enabling Middle Mile Broadband Infrastructure Program" (Middle Mile Program).

Howard County, Maryland is home to over 110,000 households and boasts a vibrant economy that supports universities, Fortune 500 companies, technology, defense, and healthcare companies, as well as proximity to 50 Federal agencies. In 2021, we launched our "Transform Howard" initiative, which is our blueprint for digital equity and inclusion in Howard County. This initiative builds on the progress we've already made to expand broadband during the pandemic but will take us into the future where Howard County is a national model for digital inclusion. We know how critical digital access is to our community – no matter your age or ability – because it provides great opportunities for residents and businesses to learn and grow. The focus is not just on connectivity, but on equity to increase choice and increase affordable options for high-speed broadband.

Through its Middle Mile project, BGE plan to leverage its utility transmission corridors to deploy a fiber backbone across central Maryland, to both: (1) support reliability and resilience of its energy delivery system – enabling, in part, new clean energy technologies such as solar, electric vehicles and more; and to (2) improve affordability, access and resiliency of internet service for communities, anchor institutions, internet service providers and other data carriers – through both last mile community and institution partnerships, as well as dark fiber leasing opportunities.

As a potential last mile connection partner through BGE's Middle Mile project, BGE's proposed middle mile fiber backbone aligns well with Howard County's communications strategy and digital equity goals in a variety of ways, including:

- Deploying low-cost middle mile fiber that lowers the cost of entry for new Internet Service Providers (ISPs). These ISPs could provide new low-cost, high-speed broadband options for our residents and businesses.
    - Specifically, this route passes through several communities of lower income around Columbia, MD that would benefit from more equitable broadband options.

- Providing an opportunity to partner and potentially add resiliency and redundancy to Howard County's own municipal fiber optic network, which supports many critical municipal offices and functions.

DocuSign Envelope ID: 39F61E60-7BA7-4E3B-95C6-AA756C82B43B

BGE's Middle Mile project illustrates the strong potential for innovative, transformational public-private partnerships that can help local communities and institutions. Howard County urges the NTIA to approve BGE's application for funding, emphasizing that BGE's Middle Mile infrastructure project will benefit digital equity in Howard County. By improving affordability in our market, this program will reduce interconnection costs for last-mile providers and provide opportunities for competitive providers to offer last-mile service, which is a key prioritization criteria for NTIA's Middle Mile program. Howard County looks forward to continuing to discuss last-mile opportunities with BGE to make the vision of a more connected Maryland a reality.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:
Calvin Ball
74320B674DEE4DF...

Calvin Ball
County Executive

DocuSigned by:
Brandee Ganz
2C0A7BD263274CE...

Brandee Ganz
Chief Information Officer