JOHN A. OLSZEWSKI, JR.
County Executive

September 14, 2022

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

Dear Secretary Raimondo:

Baltimore County Executive Johnny Olszewski and the County's Office of Information Technology strongly support the application of Baltimore Gas and Electric (BGE) for funding for its *Connected 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).

With nearly 850,000 residents, Baltimore County is the third most populous county in Maryland and now Maryland's second largest job center. We have more than 20,000 businesses, representing nine diverse industry clusters that continue to grow and add jobs annually, as well as nationally recognized public schools, institutions of higher education, hospitals and more. We understand just how critical reliable and affordable high speed internet is to our residents and businesses in every part of our County. Our 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 will 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 (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 municipal and last mile connection partner through BGE's Middle Mile project, BGE's proposed middle mile fiber backbone aligns well with Baltimore 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) that could provide low-cost, high-speed broadband options for our residents and businesses
- Providing an opportunity to partner and potentially add resiliency and redundancy to Baltimore County's own municipal fiber optic network, which supports many critical municipal offices and functions
- Establishing new partnerships and models with BGE as the utility with existing rights-of-way, infrastructure and construction capabilities that could potentially be leveraged by Baltimore County to accelerate fiber deployments and reach underserved residents

Historic Courthouse | 400 Washington Avenue | Towson, MD 21204-4665 | Phone 410-887-2450 | Fax 410-832-8496
johnnyo@baltimorecountymd.gov | www.baltimorecountymd.gov

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

Sincerely,

John A. Olszewski, Jr.
Baltimore County Executive

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