

~~BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,~~

~~Article — State Finance and Procurement~~

~~Section 3-702 and 3-705~~

~~Annotated Code of Maryland~~

~~(2001 Replacement Volume and 2002 Supplement)~~

Preamble

~~WHEREAS, many rural communities located in Southern Maryland, Western Maryland, and on the Eastern Shore of Maryland do not have ready access to available or affordable broadband communications Internet services; and~~

~~WHEREAS, the lack of broadband communications deployment has severely impeded economic development efforts in rural areas that are struggling to diversify their existing manufacturing, agricultural, and resource industry based economies; and~~

~~WHEREAS, public officials and private sector leaders from rural communities have repeatedly questioned why the State's broadband communications program has not resolved their long standing broadband access concerns; and~~

~~WHEREAS, the "eReadiness Maryland" study conducted by the Maryland Technology Development Corporation in 2002 confirmed the impression that Central Maryland had sufficient broadband infrastructure to meet the needs of business users, but also found that the rural regions had fallen behind considerably; and~~

~~WHEREAS, the Department of Budget and Management is responsible for providing communications services for State government and has been mandated to establish a telecommunications and computer network for State and local governments and public and private educational institutions in the State called networkMaryland; and~~

~~WHEREAS, networkMaryland was officially made operational on October 30, 2002, to service the needs of State agencies and other public sector entities, with expansion of the system expected to be completed by late 2004 that will include inter LATA communications access across the State; and~~

~~WHEREAS, in March 2002 the Department of Budget and Management established a very effective networkMaryland Advisory Group consisting of representatives from State agencies, local governments, hospitals, and educational institutions to provide important oversight and direction of the networkMaryland project; and~~

~~WHEREAS, the State of Maryland currently owns 313.5 miles of fiber optic cable in Central and Western Maryland that includes 48 strands of dark fiber with the following reserved deployment: 16 strands for the Maryland Department of Transportation, 20 strands for networkMaryland, and 12 strands for cooperative use by private sector firms; and~~

~~WHEREAS, there are serious State and federal regulatory concerns with opening up networkMaryland to general use by the private sector; and~~