

**SUMMARY AND REQUIREMENTS
OF HOUSE BILL 697**

Task Force on Broadband Communications Deployment in Underserved Rural Areas
(Telecommunication and Computer Network Access)

Purpose

FOR the purpose of establishing a task Force on Broadband Communications Deployment in Underserved Rural Areas; providing for the membership and duties of the Task Force; providing for staffing of the Task Force; prohibiting a member of the Task Force from receiving certain compensation; authorizing a member of the Task Force to receive reimbursement for certain expenses; providing for a panel of advisors; requiring the Task Force to report to the Governor and the General Assembly on or before certain dates; encouraging the Department of Business and Economic Development and the Department of Budget and Management to undertake certain actions; providing for the termination of the Act; and generally relating to telecommunication and computer networking and the Task Force on Broadband Communications Deployment in Underserved Rural Areas.

Task Force Members

The Task Force consists of the following 20 members:

- A. House of Delegates (3)
 - 1) Western
 - 2) Southern
 - 3) Eastern
 - B. Senate (3)
 - 1) Western
 - 2) Southern
 - 3) Eastern
 - C. Technical Experts Representing Public Sector and/or Universities (3)
 - 1) Western
 - 2) Southern
 - 3) Eastern
 - D. Department of Budget and Management
 - E. Department of Business and Economic Development
 - F. Public Service Commission
 - G. Maryland Technology Development Corporation
 - H. Forum for Rural MD
 - I. TriCounty Councils (4)
 - 1) Western
 - 2) Southern
 - 3) Eastern (Mid)
 - 4) Eastern (Lower)
 - J. Carroll or Frederick County Local Government
 - K. Harford, Cecil, Kent, or Queen. Anne's County Local Government
- The Governor shall designate the Chairman of the Task Force.

Panel of Advisors

A panel of advisors may assist the Task Force in its work as determined by the Chairman of the Task Force. The panel of advisors may include representatives of local telephone service providers; long distance telephone service providers; cable service providers; wireless service providers; satellite service providers; investor-owned electric utility providers; rural electric cooperatives; municipal electric utilities; Internet service providers; the networkMaryland Advisory Group; the networkMaryland Engineering Committee; the Governor's Technology Commission; the Information Technology Board; the Maryland Chamber of Commerce; the Maryland Municipal League; the Maryland Association of Counties; the Maryland Rural Health Association; organizations representing schools, libraries, colleges, universities and high technology councils; and any other group, organization, or person, as determined by the Chairman of the Task Force.

Task Force Duties

1. The Task Force shall consider developments and best practices in regions of the country where broadband communications are being deployed in rural communities, the broadband networking infrastructure in those areas, and the direct and indirect benefits and costs associated with the networks.
2. After considering existing State and regional broadband communications assessments and information that may become available during its deliberations, the Task Force shall evaluate:
 - A. the resources, infrastructure, and cost structures now in place or available in the various rural regions of the State for developing or obtaining access to broadband communications;
 - B. the feasibility of using existing or alternative legal mechanisms and infrastructure to support the economical development of broadband communications in rural areas of the State;
 - C. the utility of several applications where broadband communications would benefit rural areas, such as applications relating to agriculture, medicine, and education; and
 - D. any other matters that the Task Force considers pertinent to establishing effective broadband communications in the rural areas of the State.
3. The Task Force shall encourage the development of specific goals for the State in the deployment of broadband communications in rural areas, including:
 - A. the development of economically competitive access to broadband communications by the public and private sectors in each rural area of the State;
 - B. the availability of broadband communications access throughout the rural areas of the State to address issues of universal service in unserved and underserved communities;
 - C. the development of affinities and interconnection among the governmental units in the State, educational institutions, and private industry; and
 - D. any other goals that the Task Force determines to be in the public interest.
4. The Task Force shall develop proposals and recommendations for the establishment and enhancement of broadband communications in rural areas by:
 - A. reviewing government policies for the promotions, development and economically competitive use of broadband communications;
 - B. identifying sources of funding and support, including leveraging of State and federal resources;
 - C. encouraging private and public participation in the development and use of broadband communications in rural areas, including demand aggregation and resource leveraging to enhance economic and technological development; and
 - A. examining other pertinent issues.
5. The Task Force shall oversee the implementation of the Task Force's recommendations made under item (4), and as the Task Force may determine, offer any recommendations pertaining to:
 - A. legislation for possible introduction in the 2004 or 2005 session of the General Assembly to implement the recommendations of the Task Force;
 - B. budget provisions and amendments for inclusion in the State budgets for fiscal years 2005, 2006, and beyond; and
 - C. programmatic changes in State procurement and other areas that might be implemented by regulation.

Reporting Requirements

The Task Force shall report to the Governor and the President of the Senate of Maryland, the Speaker of the House of Delegates, the Senate Finance Committee, the House Economic Matter Committee, and the chairmen of the General Assembly's rural delegations.

1. On or before December 1, 2003, the Task Force shall provide a preliminary report and draft statewide rural development plan focusing on public and private broadband communications access.

2. On or before January 15, 2004, the Task Force shall provide an interim report and recommendations for a statewide broadband communication plan focusing on private sector access.
3. On or before December 1, 2004, the Task Force shall provide a progress report on the implementation of the plans for public and private broadband communications access, together with any follow-up recommendations.
4. On or before June 30, 2005, the Task Force shall provide a final report of the Task Force.

Staffing and Support

The Maryland Technology Development Corporation shall provide staff support to the Task Force, with the assistance of the Forum for Rural Maryland, the Department of Budget and Management, and the Department of Business and Economic Development, and other appropriate State, regional, and local agencies.