



Testimony on HB 551

Broadband Expansion Incentive

Position: FAVORABLE

The Baltimore Community Foundation (BCF) is proud to submit this letter of support for the Broadband Expansion Incentive Act of 2023.

Over the past 50 years, BCF has put its expertise, financial resources and relationships to use advocating for legislation that addresses Baltimore's most pressing issues. Most notably, we have funded research and built broad coalitions to push for game-changing investments like 21st Century schools and the Blueprint for Maryland's Future to advance educational equity. Advocacy for these policies has been leveraged against millions of dollars in BCF grants to multiply the impact of the state's investments.

Most recently, BCF has focused its efforts on bridging the digital divide, ensuring every community has access to education, employment, telehealth, banking and other opportunities afforded by high-speed internet. Since 2020, we have awarded grants to nonprofits like PCs for People and the Digital Equity Coalition, co-funded the hiring of a director of broadband and digital equity for the City of Baltimore and successfully advocated for the Digital Connectivity Act of 2021.

These have been important investments, resulting in much-needed devices for students and families, the expansion of public Wi-Fi hotspots, and enhanced service for low-to-moderate income Comcast customers. Yet one challenge has remained: infrastructure. The network remains under-developed and under-resourced in many low-income communities and communities of color, creating disparities in service and thereby access to opportunities. Families that would benefit most from additional education and training opportunities, employment opportunities, telehealth access, and banking and financial services instead struggle with weak, unreliable signal strength.

The Broadband Expansion Incentive Act of 2023 will help to overcome this issue by removing taxes on broadband network machinery and equipment over the next five years. This aligns with the state's timeline for connecting all Marylanders to broadband internet, removing one potential barrier to achieving the goal. Further, the legislation waives state taxes on federal investments that companies can use to deploy broadband, maximizing taxpayer resources and hastening expansion. In the midst of a massive, once-in-a-generation influx of federal funds for infrastructure, this ensures the maximum amount of dollars are invested and that maximum progress is made toward a more connected region.

I urge you to pass the Broadband Expansion Incentive Act of 2023, helping to speed access opportunity to many more children families and communities.

A blue ink signature of Dr. Shanaysha Sauls, consisting of stylized, overlapping loops.

Dr. Shanaysha Sauls

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