

Testimony SUPPORT of House Bill 1064  
Commercial Law – Maryland Net Neutrality Act of 2021

House Economic Matters Committee  
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The Maryland State Education Association supports HB 1064, which would bring net neutrality to Maryland. This year has shown the importance of access to internet for the students and educators of Maryland. That access must not only be affordable, but also safe and

MSEA represents 75,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland’s public schools, teaching and preparing our 896,837 students for careers and jobs of the future. MSEA also represents 39 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3 million-member National Education Association (NEA).

MSEA supports this legislation that would help ensure that Maryland students have more equitable access to the internet and materials. This bill would prohibit fixed Internet service providers from blocking certain content, applications, services, or devices, or impairing or degrading certain Internet traffic.

The National Education Association has been active in the fight for net neutrality for years at the federal level, especially when the FCC removed these protections during the Trump Administration. The NEA partnered with many organizations pushing to ensure equitable access to the internet, including the American Library Association. American Library Association President Courtney Young<sup>1</sup> explained how net neutrality would impact two students researching a paper- one that has net neutrality, and one that does not:

*“An individual student is connected to a single Internet service provider (ISP), which becomes the gateway through which the student must connect to gain access to millions of web pages, platforms and services.*

*Gina—with an open Internet connection—is free to choose whatever information or resources she likes from small, highly specialized content providers or large global corporations, no matter which ISP she uses and no matter if she is using fixed or mobile broadband.*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/what-net-neutrality-means-students-and-educators>



*Stan, the student without an open Internet, might be blocked from accessing resources that compete with content offered by his ISP. For example, Comcast merged with NBC Universal several years ago. So, if Stan uses Comcast to access the Internet, he might be redirected to NBC Learn when he was trying to get PBS content. Or perhaps a commercial distributor of primary source materials had made a deal with Verizon to expedite its content. Stan might have to wait for a sluggish download of open educational resources versus getting super-fast access to the commercial content.”*

While these are just examples, you can see how these protections can have a big impact on a student’s ability to research and learn. This is even more pronounced for educators who are trying to put together lessons or activities for students in the current digital environment. They need the ability to look at all sources and determine the best, highest quality materials to present to their students. They are only able to do this with access to a free internet.

MSEA agrees with NEA, when they stated in a 2018 letter<sup>2</sup> to US Senators, that “net neutrality is paramount to protecting the free and open internet...The internet serves as an open platform for all our educators and the students in their classrooms – no matter their geographic locale or socio-economic status – to exchange information and ideas, create content, engage in civic and intellectual discourse, conduct research, and enhance teaching and learning in our schools and communities across the country.”

The Biden Administration also recently announced its formal repeal of the Department of Justice’s challenge to California’s net neutrality law<sup>3</sup>. This shows the Administration’s support of the policy and should be a green-light for Maryland to pass its own version of the law.

**MSEA urges a favorable report of House Bill 1064.**

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<sup>2</sup> <https://cqrcengage.com/nea/file/G4McaENNDJ6/SJ-Res52-Congressional-Review-Act-Net-Neutrality.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://thehill.com/policy/technology/537874-biden-administration-drops-lawsuit-against-californias-net-neutrality-law>