

January 26, 2021
HB 97: Support



Chair Davis, Vice Chair Dumais, and members of the House Economic Matters Committee,

Strong Schools Maryland supports House Bill 97, the Digital Connectivity Act of 2021.

The bill provides the foundational framework necessary for Maryland to begin equitably addressing high-speed broadband internet connectivity for all residents, including our students and public school communities.

The most regularly unacknowledged contributor to the current digital education inequity and learning loss crises is neither the coronavirus pandemic itself, nor the resulting school building closures. It is the persistent, systemic inequity in access and opportunity that we have allowed to pervade our society. HB 97 offers an opportunity for Maryland to take a systemic approach to addressing such inequity.

The goals of the Office of Digital Inclusion, ensuring high-quality, affordable broadband is available to every Marylander and that they have the tools necessary to take advantage of that access. These goals must undergird our attempts at digital inclusivity, digital learning, and digital economic advancements as we experience more of the 21st century.

The Maryland State Department of Education's own Digital Learning Workgroup notes that online and blended (hybrid) learning model utilization in Maryland is uneven and presents an opportunity for growth. The General Assembly must seize that opportunity.

In short, in order for the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, and any future wide-reaching education initiative, digital connectivity is a basic assumption, not a luxury. For these reasons, Strong Schools Maryland urges a favorable report.

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