

HB 97: Digital Connectivity Act of 2021

January 26, 2021
Economic Matters Committee

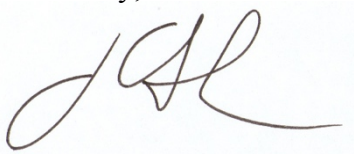
Dear Chair Davis, Vice Chair Dumais, and colleagues on the Economic Matters Committee:

My name is Jason Hardebeck. I am currently slated to establish the Mayor's Office of Broadband and Digital Equity in Baltimore City. I am testifying today in support of House Bill 97 to expand the Office of Rural Broadband's mission to adopt a statewide approach to digital inclusion. Although the effort to improve connectivity in our rural areas is critically important, fully 2/3 of Maryland households that lack internet access are located in metropolitan counties and cities. In Baltimore, over 41% of households do not have a fixed broadband connection, which means that right now, **nearly 40,000 children lack adequate and reliable access** to participate in virtual schooling and other essential online activities.

As the last 12 months have clearly shown, our society's ability to function effectively is highly reliant on affordable, high quality, and ubiquitous access to digital tools and the Internet. **Maryland is currently one of only six states** without a statewide approach to these issues, and standing up the Office of Digital Inclusion would be a significant and positive step to address this structural inequity for all Maryland residents.

For these reasons, I request a favorable report on **House Bill 97**.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JHR', is written over a light blue rectangular background.

Jason Hardebeck