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**HB 97**

January 26, 2021

**TO:** Members of the House Economic Matters Committee  
**FROM:** Natasha Mehu, Director of Government Relations  
**RE:** HOUSE BILL 97 - Department of Housing and Community Development  
- Office of Digital Inclusion - Established (Digital Connectivity Act of  
2021)

**POSITION: SUPPORT**

Chair Davis, Vice Chair Dumais, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** House Bill (HB) 97.

HB 97 creates an Office of Digital Inclusion in the Department of Housing and Community Development charged with ensuring all Maryland residents have access or resources to access reliable, affordable, high quality internet. The Office would set standards, collect and analyze data, and identify and coordinate the delivery of resources to local jurisdictions to improve access to broadband.

Broadband access is critical for education, telehealth, and remote working. While the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the digital divide by putting a spotlight on inequities around affordable broadband access the gaps in services to our residents are not new. The lack of broadband access has been a growing concern that touches each corner of the State.

Baltimore City is focused on improving broadband access for our residents and is hiring a new Director of Broadband and Digital Equity to see those plans to fruition. HB 97 would allow the City to leverage the work happening locally with a statewide office. It's essential we all work together to close the digital divide that has been holding back our residents by supporting efforts, like HB 97 that would ensure a coordinated approach to expanding digital access and inclusion.

Accordingly, the BCA respectfully requests a **favorable** report on House Bill 97.

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