

SB 66 - PGCEX - Support.pdf

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Position: FAV



THE PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT

OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

BILL: Senate Bill 66 - Department of Housing and Community Development - Office of Digital Inclusion - Established (Digital Connectivity Act of 2021)

SPONSOR: Senator Elfreth, *et al.*

HEARING DATE: February 9, 2021

COMMITTEE: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

CONTACT: Intergovernmental Affairs Office, 301-780-8411

POSITION: SUPPORT

The Office of the Prince George's County Executive **SUPPORTS Senate Bill 66 - Department of Housing and Community Development - Office of Digital Inclusion - Established (Digital Connectivity Act of 2021)**, which establishes the Office of Digital Inclusion in the Department of Housing and Community Development to ensure that every resident of the State is supported by high-quality broadband Internet service at an affordable price and has the tools necessary to use and take advantage of the Internet. The bill also directs the Office to prepare a statewide plan to ensure every state resident can connect to universal, affordable, and reliable broadband internet before 2030.

The digital divide in Maryland has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 public health crises, with many jobs and schools transitioning away from in-person access to internet-only. For families in need who lack a computer or high-speed internet access, this brave new world of internet-only schooling and work risks further isolating those who can least afford it. We, in Prince George's County, have already taken several steps to help connect families, with Prince George's County Public Schools committing \$2 million and partnering with Verizon and Comcast help families in need connect to the internet. While we are doing our part to help close this divide, it is time that the State made it a priority to ensure that all Marylanders have access to high-speed internet.

For these reasons, the Office of the Prince George's County Executive **SUPPORTS Senate Bill 66** and asks for a **FAVORABLE** report.

SB66_Support_KKI_Broadband Access.pdf

Uploaded by: Arneson, Emily

Position: FAV



DATE: February 9, 2021 **COMMITTEE:** Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs
BILL NO: Senate Bill 66
BILL TITLE: Department of Housing and Community Development - Office of Digital Inclusion -
Established (Digital Connectivity Act of 2021)
POSITION: Support

Kennedy Krieger Institute supports Senate Bill 66 - Department of Housing and Community Development - Office of Digital Inclusion - Established (Digital Connectivity Act of 2021)

Bill Summary: Senate Bill 66 establishes the Office of Digital Inclusion within the MD Department of Housing and Community Development to ensure that every resident of the State has access to high-quality broadband internet service at an affordable price.

Background:

Kennedy Krieger Institute is dedicated to improving the lives of children and young adults with developmental, behavioral, cognitive and physical challenges. Kennedy Krieger's services include inpatient, outpatient, school-based and community-based programs.

Kennedy Krieger Schools: Kennedy Krieger is deeply proud of our nonpublic schools, currently serving over 550 publically funded students with complex disabilities from over half of the school districts in Maryland. We employ nearly an equal number of highly trained teachers, related-service clinicians, and support staff. We have long-standing partnerships with the Maryland State Department of Education and the Local School Systems based upon our specialized expertise and commitment to children with disabilities.

Alongside our public and nonpublic special education partners, Kennedy Krieger has mobilized to leverage our extraordinary expertise by actively developing and implementing individualized "continuity of learning" plans that are consistent with our high quality multidisciplinary approach, avoiding the danger of generic continuous learning plans. In addition to the learning plans, we have leveraged the expertise of the Institute to deliver related therapy services through telehealth practices pioneered by Kennedy Krieger Institute.

Kennedy Krieger Children's Hospital: Kennedy Krieger serves more than 25,000 individuals a year (more than 85% are children from Maryland, coming to us from every county). Our highly trained professionals use an interdisciplinary approach to provide comprehensive patient care that incorporates multiple fields, including, but not limited to: audiology, behavioral psychology, child life and therapeutic recreation, neuropsychology, nursing, nutrition, occupational and physical therapies, psychiatry, social work, special education, speech/language pathology, and trauma-informed therapy.

Kennedy Krieger Institute Telehealth services include education, consultation, evaluation, and treatment. Prior to the pandemic, Kennedy Krieger had an established telebehavioral health program with demonstrated outcomes across telehealth and clinic-based services. In the pre-pandemic, six weeks leading up to March 15th, 2020, 18 of the 585 Kennedy Krieger providers delivered 70 telehealth appointments (approximately 11 per week). Since March 15th, 2020 the Institute's 585 providers have delivered over 72,000 telehealth appointments (approximately 4,000 per week), although many families struggle with inconsistent connectivity.

Rationale:

An Office of Digital Inclusion for Maryland would facilitate and negotiate collaborative partnerships on a larger scale with private and federal entities to work to close the gaps in access to internet services statewide.

As noted in the Abell Foundation's report on the "digital divide" published May 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has made internet access part of the social safety net. While the report focused on Baltimore City, the information is applicable to communities and jurisdictions across Maryland. In today's world, broadband connectivity should not be a luxury, but rather a right to which every individual has access. This bill would ensure a thoughtful, organized process to expanding broadband throughout Maryland and ensure that every Marylander is guaranteed this service.

Within Baltimore City and other high population density areas in Maryland, broadband is not a given, with many students sitting in coffee shops, parking lots, and other locations to attend their classes. Numerous studies have shown that there is a huge disparity in virtual education, exacerbating an already large achievement gap and causing a devastating toll.

Maryland's rural jurisdictions share common characteristics that set them apart from their suburban and urban counterparts, such as geographic isolation, lack of transportation, and lack of access to health care availability. Health profession shortages exist in Maryland's rural regions, where a greater percentage of Maryland's residents live.

In-home telehealth services are feasible, safe, efficient, and effective, and they allow families across the state access to the highest quality of services and providers available. For Maryland families with little or no access to care, telehealth provides quality services and lowers the cost associated with the continued lack of proper treatment. However, telehealth is a nonstarter if a patient does not have access to the infrastructure needed for access.

Kennedy Krieger Institute requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 66.

CCPL Testimony- Digital Connectivity Act SB66 -Sen

Uploaded by: Berstler, Andrea

Position: FAV

Testimony in support of
SB66 – Digital Connectivity Act
Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
Tuesday, January 26, 2021

Honorable Committee Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan and Distinguished Senators:

On behalf of Carroll County Public Library (CCPL) and as the Legislative Officer for the Maryland Library Association (MLA), I want to thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of the Digital Connectivity Act.

While it describes something in the virtual world, the “Digital Divide” has a very ‘real world’ impact. The digital divide is a challenge in three ways. Those who do not have digital access because *no access is offered or available in their location (accessibility)*. Those who *cannot afford access (economically)* and those who *do not know how to use digital tools and information (literacy)*. All three are very real barriers for many in our state and all three prevent people from fully participating in our society, democracy and economy.

Recent data from the Abell Foundation tells us that over 520,000 Marylander’s do not subscribe to wired broadband services at their home. That is 23% of the population. 108,000 of these are households with children under the age of 18, creating an additional “homework” or learning gap This is especially worrisome in the time of COVID. These households are disproportionately poor, African-American and Hispanic. In fact, nearly 40% of all disconnected households are African-American. (206,000) (*Abell Foundation “Disconnected in Maryland” report, Jan 2021*)

Libraries have been working tirelessly for over 2 decades to bridge this ever-widening gap. In 1994, Maryland’s public libraries created the SAILOR Network. Developed in recognition of a future need for electronic access to information and materials outside of the walls of a library, this statewide broadband network has provided connectivity to Maryland’s public libraries, local governments and schools since 1996. During the 2019 fiscal year, public libraries offered online access on over 5,400 Internet terminals located in public libraries across the state. Additionally, our communities accessed the Internet over 4.9 million times via Wi-Fi services at a public library outlet. Currently, Maryland State Library is working with SAILOR and the Enoch Pratt Free Library to create a WiFi map. This map will make it easy to find free WiFi access anywhere in the state.

Libraries can speak as experts, then, in saying that by creating, staffing and funding the Office of Digital Inclusion, Maryland continues to take positive steps to address the causes of this problem. It will be our pleasure to work with such an office, share the lessons we have learned over the last 25 years and work together with our education, economic and government partners to assure that every resident of Maryland can both access and use the wonderful digital tools available to them.

On behalf of the Carroll County Board of Trustees and the Board of the Maryland Library Association, I thank you for your work in addressing this issue.

Respectfully submitted by

Andrea Berstler

Executive Director, Carroll County Public Library

Legislative Officer, Maryland Library Association

SB 66 - to EHEA FAV Feb 9.pdf

Uploaded by: Bogdan, Henry

Position: FAV

February 9, 2021

Testimony on Senate Bill 66
Department of Housing and Community Development –
Office of Digital Inclusion - Established (Digital Connectivity Act of 2021)
Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

Position: Favorable

Maryland Nonprofits is a statewide association of more than 1100 nonprofit organizations and institutions. We strongly urge you to support Senate Bill 66.

Our collective awareness of something known as ‘the digital divide’ probably began shortly after the emergence of the world-wide web as an everyday tool and convenience in both business and personal communication. To whatever extent we may have understood the importance of the internet in our day-to-day lives, the COVID pandemic has dramatically magnified the absolute deprivation that lack of adequate rapid broadband access represents for families – and businesses – that don’t have it.

In communities across Maryland, from isolated or rural, and to others in our urban settings, people without the ability or means to access broadband communication, who are more commonly in poor neighborhoods or communities of color, were essentially cut-off from critical services or opportunities: to safely work or shop from home, to find work, to file for unemployment, to find health care or benefit from telehealth, to participate in remote learning, even to find critical information about the disease, financial relief, social services, or food assistance. Even in the nonprofit sector, the majority of organizations have had to shift services and activities to virtual operations.

Most of us, certainly those participating in today’s hearing, can routinely access any of those services or opportunities on the internet. But whether the result of development or community planning decisions, limited affordable housing opportunities, costs and lack of adequate income, or limited personal ability or experience, too many Marylanders cannot. In many of these cases it is the result of past or ongoing social or racial inequities that has cut off so many families in the most critical of times.

The extent of this crisis is well documented by the findings of the recently completed Abell Foundation report [“Disconnected in Maryland”](#): “

- Some 520,000 Maryland households do not subscribe to wireline broadband service at home. That comes to 23% of homes lacking service.
- Approximately 391,000 Maryland homes do not have a desktop or laptop computer, or 18% of all households.
- Close to 290,000 Maryland households have neither a desktop, laptop, nor tablet computing device in their homes. That is 13% of households without these digital access tools.

- Some 108,000 Maryland households with children under the age of 18 do not have wireline internet service at home. These households suffering from the “homework gap” are disproportionately poor, African American, and Hispanic.

The Report also noted that “Internet access means very little without a computing device to log on, and there are substantial gaps in computer ownership in Maryland:

- 391,000 Maryland homes do not have either a desktop or laptop computer, or nearly one in five (18%) homes.
- Nearly 290,000 Maryland households lack either a desktop, laptop, or tablet computer (or 13% of all homes).
- As with wireline broadband subscriptions, the weight of these gaps falls heavily in urban and metro areas and among African American households.

Senate Bill 66 will expand the state’s focus and broaden our ‘agency infrastructure’ to address this issue on a statewide basis, with a new Office of Digital Inclusion and with a charge the recognizes the full scope of work and activities that are required, including development of a plan by 2022 to “ensure that every resident of the State has the ability to connect to universal, affordable, reliable broadband internet”.

Henry Bogdan
Director of Public Policy
hbogdan@mdnonprofit.org

SB0066-HB0097 Internet Inclusion.pdf

Uploaded by: Britt, Adiena

Position: FAV

HB0097 cross-filed with SB0066 Department of Housing and Community Development - Office of Digital Inclusion - Established (Digital Connectivity Act of 2021)

Stance: Support

Testimony: My name is Adiena C. Britt and I reside within the 45th Legislative District. I am writing to offer my full support of HB0097 and SB0066. Internet access should be treated like a utility such as water or gas & electric. This should not be a "luxury" item for only those that can afford it, as it has become a necessary component to navigating through everyday life. It is an integral part of remote school learning, proper functionality of cell phones, web-based job seeking, web-based filing of taxes, unemployment, job applications, banking, higher educational learning, and pretty much everything else we do as a society. Especially in times of Covid-19 and the ensuing restrictions on outside movements, work, and schooling. I don't think because a person or family is of modest to little means that they should be without these capabilities. Nor should they have to rely on Public hotspots, the library, or going to some public place for access. Everyone should have access in their homes, and it should be affordable.

Right now, there is a lack of competition within Baltimore City and the more remote areas of ALL MD counties for these services. This allows these few companies to charge exorbitant fees for their 'services' and they aren't forced to provide fast, reliable services everywhere; just wherever they see fit to install their operational lines. MD needs to move as fast as technology is moving, and not leave the less fortunate behind.

*I would also like to include text I received from my internet carrier in an e-mail. I have a child that is remote learning as a Senior in High School. I am already paying an exorbitant amount for services to Xfinity/Comcast and there are a lack of options for Internet access within City Limits; so they're basically bordering on a monopoly. Something should be done about this because it's extortion of funds:

"As of January 1, 2021, your Xfinity Internet Data Usage Plan includes 1.2 Terabytes (TB), which is equal to 1,229 Gigabytes (GB), of data per month. So far, you've used 75% of the data included in your plan for January 2021.

We're letting you know because beginning in March your bill can be impacted if you go over your 1.2TB (1,229GB) plan. As part of this new Data Usage Plan, you'll be charged \$10, plus tax, up to a maximum of \$100 per month for each additional 50GB of data used over 1.2TB in a month."

Thank You.

Adiena C. Britt

6014 Old Harford Road

Baltimore, MD 21214

SB66_LatinoCaucus_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Caucus, MD Latino

Position: FAV



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TO: Senator Paul G. Pinsky, Chair
Senator Cheryl C. Kagan, Vice Chair
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee Members

FROM: Maryland Legislative Latino Caucus (MLLC)

DATE: February 9, 2021

RE: SB66 Department of Housing and Community Development –
Office of Digital Inclusion – Established (Digital Connectivity Act
of 2021)

The MLLC supports SB66 Department of Housing and Community Development – Office of Digital Inclusion – Established (Digital Connectivity Act of 2021).

The MLLC is a bipartisan group of Senators and Delegates committed to supporting legislation that improves the lives of Latinos throughout our state. The MLLC is a crucial voice in the development of public policy that uplifts the Latino community and benefits the state of Maryland. Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to express our support of SB66.

In a society where most things operate through websites and applications, internet access is crucial for most daily activities. Far too many Americans still do not have access to the technology and affordable high-speed broadband they need to succeed in today's economy. High speed internet enables job opportunities, educational resources, the ability to connect virtually with loved ones, and to make appointments and consults with healthcare providers.

A vast majority of Maryland's population has internet service. However, there are large populations in our state that lack adequate or any internet service. About [324,000 Maryland residents](#) in rural areas do not have access to high-speed internet and nearly [41% of Baltimore City homes](#) do not have any internet. Additionally, many [Baltimore City households](#) are low-income families that also not own a computer or laptop. This clear digital divide that also tends to hurt Black and Brown communities, establishes obstacles for educational attainment, financial growth, and access to healthcare resources. The legislature can remedy this impediment.

SB66 expands the scope of the Office of Rural Broadband to become a statewide Office of Digital Connectivity focused on ensuring that all Marylanders, whether rural or urban, have access to reliable, universal, high-quality, and high-speed internet service at an affordable price. With our current economic and health crisis, it is the precise time to find a statewide solution that addresses all Marylanders' internet needs.

The MLLC supports this bill and urges a favorable report on SB66.

Testimony In Support of SB 66 HB 97 Digital Connec

Uploaded by: Ceruolo, Rich

Position: FAV

January 25, 2021

Maryland Senate
11 Bladen St.
Annapolis, MD. 21401

Support for SB 66 / HB 97 – Digital Connectivity Act of 2021 – Dept of Housing – Office of Digital Inclusion – Established.

Good day members of the Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee.

I am writing to you today to support expanding access to high-speed internet service, affordable fees and the establishment of an office of digital equality by way of the Digital Connectivity Act of 2021.

Parents and advocate for education fully support this important piece of legislation and will have a huge impact on many Maryland families. Especially as we all remain at home, in the midst of distance learning demands on families due to the lasting impacts of the COVID 19 pandemic. The many inequities in internet access, the digital divide, have been brought to the forefront of conversations around equality and access to the internet, especially as it relates to access to remote learning.

All Maryland families and students deserve access to affordable, consistent, high-quality broadband services. In today's world, digital access is a necessity rather than a luxury service option. Many citizens rely on reliable, affordable broadband services for so many aspects of their daily lives. Please help all Maryland citizens achieve equal access to vital services vital to modern day life.

We hope that you will all fully support this bill and take the actions that can help bring more equity and equality to so many Maryland communities that truly need these services to access modern broadband services.

Please vote to support SB 66 / HB 97, The Digital Connectivity Act of 2021.

Thank you.

Mr. Richard Ceruolo,
Parent and advocate for children with disabilities and Maryland families.
Parent Advocacy Consortium

Digital Connectivity Act of 2021 - Written Testimo

Uploaded by: Coy, Andrew

Position: FAV



Digital Harbor Foundation
1045 Light Street
Baltimore, MD 21230

February 5, 2021

Dear Education Health and Environmental Affairs Committee Members,

The Digital Harbor Foundation is dedicated to fostering learning, creativity, productivity, and community through education. In 2013 we transformed a closed-down rec center in Baltimore City into a vibrant Tech Center for youth. In 2014 we launched the Center of Excellence to train others how to incorporate making into their own learning environments. In 2019 we further expanded our work to include a number of projects specifically addressing issues of the digital divide. Additionally, we have served as founding members of the Baltimore Digital Equity Coalition, with specific leadership on the Internet Access Team. Through all of our work we know that lack of Internet access is a significant barrier for tens of thousands of households in Baltimore and even more across the state.

We are writing this letter in strong support for SB66, and the establishment of an Office of Digital Inclusion in the Department of Housing and Community Development.

We do so as it is our belief that the Internet should begin to be treated more like the utility that it has become than the luxury good it has been (and is currently still being treated as). We believe that the State of Maryland should organize efforts to address critical gaps across the state and to benefit from coordination and collaboration. We believe that the State of Maryland must make a commitment to be as intentionally inclusive as possible and focus on the development, coordination, and support of Internet Access broadly, with specific support and attention to the community-owned Gap Networks .

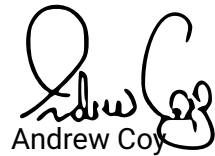
Of critical importance to addressing the issues that have led to lack of Internet Access, it stands to reason that policy makers need access to more information than is currently available and that this should be accomplished by the creation of "Report Card" in which performative data from Internet Service Providers, submitted in aggregate by Community Statistical Area. Furthermore, we believe that a higher standard should be set for the speeds required to certify an Internet connection as "high-speed" and that to accomplish this, a formula should be developed and adopted that accounts for the regular increasing needs of technology.

Without a state-wide office that is codified and properly resourced, Maryland will fall further behind other states and negatively impact our educational, economic, cultural, and health outcomes in which we have traditionally been positive leaders. Additionally, we will miss out on federal funding and opportunities unless we are better organized and coordinated than we are currently.

Over the past year Internet and digital equity have been shown to be of such importance that it makes it crystal clear more structure is needed to respond to the critical needs for digital equity for all Marylanders.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony. Your care and concern for the well-being and connectedness of all Marylanders is much appreciated and noticed. Thank you!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew Coy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "A" and "C".

Andrew Coy
Executive Director
Digital Harbor Foundation

RWD_SB0066.pdf

Uploaded by: deloney, amalia

Position: FAV

Department of Housing and Community Development
SB0066
Digital Connectivity Act of 2021
February 9, 2021
SUPPORT

February 5, 2021

Dear Department of Housing and Community Development Members,

The Robert W. Deutsch Foundation invests in innovative people, projects, and ideas that improve the quality of life in Baltimore and beyond. For over thirty years the Foundation has brought a lens of racial equity and a commitment to actions that challenge those inequities to our grant making, priority setting process, programming and strategic planning in the city of Baltimore.

Today we express our unequivocal support for HB97, and the establishment of an Office of Digital Inclusion in the Department of Housing and Community Development. As a place-based funder, we witness--and are asked to mitigate--the daily impact of the digital divide. Across the city of Baltimore, more than 40% of the population lacks home internet access, approximately 96,000 households, the majority of which are Black and Latinx¹. Black and Latinx residents are not only the most impacted by Baltimore's digital divide, but are also the most likely to suffer from educational setbacks, economic loss, and compromised health conditions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Income inequality, biased credit scoring and other forms of systemic racial discrimination are just some of barriers that low-income populations and communities of color continue to face. These households are denied the power of broadband to apply for jobs, pursue educational opportunities, participate in civic life and organize for social change.

Nearly eleven months into the COVID-19 pandemic, we must tackle the impact of the digital divide, as broadband inequities are cast in sharper relief. Whether students who cannot attend school; isolated seniors who cannot do a telehealth visit; immigrant business owners unable to transition to digital storefronts; or neighborhood leaders who are blocked from civic engagement, the challenge of the digital divide underscores the undeniable relationship between broadband and full participation in today's society.

¹ Abell Foundation. "Baltimore's Digital Divide: Gaps in Internet Connectivity and the Impact on Low-Income Residents." Updated May 2020. <https://abell.org/publications/baltimores-digital-divide-gaps-internet-connectivity-and-impact-low-income-city>

ROBERT W.
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Establishing the Office of Digital Inclusion will help to ensure that every resident in the state, regardless of zip code, immigration or economic status is supported by *fast, affordable and reliable* broadband service.
society.

We know digital equity is about more than access to devices and strong internet connections, it's a leveler of society and a precursor to racial and economic justice. Now more than ever we must acknowledge our economic future depends on everyone having access to this vital resource.

Establishing the Office of Digital Inclusion will help to ensure that every resident in the state, regardless of zip code, immigration or economic status is supported by *fast, affordable and reliable* broadband service.

For the reasons stated above, the Robert W. Deutsch foundation respectfully requests a favorable report on HB97.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Amalia Deloney', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

amalia deloney

SB 66- Department of Housing and Community Develop

Uploaded by: Dorrien, Erin

Position: FAV



Maryland
Hospital Association

February 9, 2021

To: The Honorable Paul G. Pinsky, Chair, Senate Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee

Re: Letter of Support- Senate Bill 66- Department of Housing and Community Development - Office of Digital Inclusion - Established (Digital Connectivity Act of 2021)

Dear Chairman Pinsky:

On behalf of the Maryland Hospital Association's (MHA) 60 member hospitals and health systems, we appreciate the opportunity to comment in support of Senate Bill 66.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted long-standing inequities nationwide, including the stark digital divide that harms access to education and health care. Marylanders without broadband internet or digital devices at home have been at a disadvantage during this period of remote learning and telemedicine.

About 520,000 Maryland households do not subscribe to wireline broadband service, and 18% do not have a desktop or laptop computer, according to a report commissioned by the Community Development Network of Maryland.¹ Entire ZIP codes in our state—from Western Maryland to the Eastern Shore to Baltimore City—have average Internet upload speeds that are half of what are needed for a group video call.² During the pandemic, Marylanders with limited connectivity relied on phone consultations as the sole option for care when an in-person visit was not possible.

SB 66 acknowledges the importance of reliable and affordable broadband. This bill would create the Office of Digital Inclusion and conduct a statewide audit to determine where resources are needed to close the digital divide. Broadband is no longer a luxury, but a necessity. Telehealth use by Medicaid and CHIP beneficiaries rose 2,600% in three months at the beginning of the pandemic. Maryland can't go backward. SB 66 would allow the state to leverage resources to ensure everyone has broadband. This step would help improve health outcomes, particularly for those who otherwise might lack access to care.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report of SB 66.

For more information, please contact:
Erin Dorrien, Director, Government Affairs & Policy
Edorrien@mhaonline.org

¹ The Abell Foundation. (January, 2021). The Abel Report: [Disconnected in Maryland: Statewide Data Show the Racial and Economic Underpinnings of the Digital Divide](#)

² Maryland Attorney General's COVID-19 Access to Justice Task Force. (2021). [Miscellaneous Dashboard- Map of Internet Upload Speeds by Zip Code](#).

Libraries Without Borders US TESTIMONY SB66, 2-04-

Uploaded by: Echelman, Adam

Position: FAV



660 N Capitol St NW
Washington DC 20001

**Testimony SB66
Budget & Taxation Committee
February 5, 2021**

Position: FAVORABLE

Dear Chairman Guzzone & Members of the Budget & Taxation Committee:

I'm writing as the Executive Director of Libraries Without Borders US (LWB US), a non-profit organization that delivers access to information, education, and cultural resources where it's needed most. In that capacity, I oversee various connectivity programs throughout Baltimore, including computer distributions in community gardens and churches as well as a city-wide collaboration with the Enoch Pratt Free Library to provide WiFi and technology in laundromats. I also serve as a co-founder and volunteer for Baltimore's Digital Equity Coalition where I lead a coordinating body of more than 60 organizations across Baltimore who are collectively working to increase access to internet, computer, and digital skills, especially for low-income, Black, and Latinx residents who are disproportionately left behind.

In the day-to-day work that I see, both as a volunteer and co-founder of the Baltimore Digital Equity Coalition and at Libraries Without Borders, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the latent and pervasive impact of the digital divide on the everyday lives of Baltimore residents: children who are unable to attend school, adults who cannot apply for a job or access crucial benefits without a computer, seniors who cannot meet with their doctor online, tenants who cannot attend a remote court hearing, and so many others who are shut out of civic life and essential services. These residents rely on the laundromats where Libraries Without Borders works in order to access basic services through technology and computers. Through data collected in Libraries Without Borders' computer distribution program, known as ConnectED, we saw that more than 400 individuals across Baltimore need a computer at home to finish college, to write a resume, to sign up for the COVID-19 vaccine, and so much more. This divide existed long before the pandemic and will persist without a long-term strategy and clear policy goals.

HB 97/SB 66 would establish the Office of Digital Inclusion in the Department of Housing and Community to ensure that every resident of the State is supported by high quality broadband Internet service at an affordable price and, has the tools necessary to use and take advantage of the Internet. As a recent Abell Foundation report shows, two-thirds of Maryland residents without internet live in Baltimore City and metro areas. Maryland needs one central office dedicated to broadband expansion for the whole state. We respectfully request a favorable report for HB 97/SB 66.

Submitted by
Adam Echelman
Executive Director, Libraries Without Borders

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A Echelman', is located to the right of the typed name.

SB66_MICUA_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Fidler, Sara

Position: FAV



Maryland Independent College
and University Association

Written Support

**Senate Education, Health, and
Environmental Affairs Committee**

***Senate Bill 66 (Elfreth) Department of Housing and Community Development –
Office of Digital Inclusion – Established (Digital Connectivity Act of 2021)***

Sara C. Fidler, President
sfidler@micua.org

February 9, 2021

On behalf of Maryland’s independent colleges and universities and the 65,600 students we serve, thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of ***Senate Bill 66 (Elfreth) – Department of Housing and Community Development – Office of Digital Inclusion***. This bill establishes the Office of Digital Inclusion in the Department of Housing and Community Development “to ensure that every resident of the state is supported in the adoption of reliable, universal, high-quality broadband Internet service at an affordable price; and has the tools necessary to use the Internet and take advantage of Internet resources.” Our students, faculty members, and staff have been impacted by the COVID-19 public health emergency along with the rest of the world, and we believe that Senate Bill 66 is a step in the right direction to begin to address some of the technology-related obstacles that have been created by a reliance on, and implementation of, remote higher education.

Following Governor Hogan’s declaration of a State of Emergency, every MICUA institution took steps to transition to virtual instruction. By March 20, 2020, all of our institutions determined that remote instruction would continue for the rest of the spring semester. During the fall 2020 semester, eight of our schools offered only virtual instruction, while five of our schools offered a de-densified socially distant residential experience with a hybrid model of both face-to-face and virtual instruction. For the spring 2021 semester, ten of our schools are offering a hybrid model of both face-to-face and virtual instruction, one will phase in a hybrid model later in the semester, and two are offering only virtual instruction. Each institution has successfully balanced the best interests of its students, faculty, and staff.

However, the implementation of remote and hybrid work and learning environments has not been without challenge. For example, students who would have typically accessed on-campus computer/technology facilities to complete classroom requirements no longer had this option during the pandemic. To alleviate some of these barriers, the MICUA member institutions established:

- laptop loaner programs for both students and faculty with contactless checkout systems;
- the provision of additional equipment, such as webcams, and hotspots, as reliable Internet access is a major obstacle for many of our students;
- a common online communication platform (one school provided all faculty with Zoom licenses);
- expanded technology help desk hours covering evenings and weekends to support students in different time zones and on different schedules; and
- technology grants for students to purchase equipment and pay for high-speed internet.

The digital divide that existed pre-pandemic has been exacerbated by the new normal. Senate Bill 66 aims to improve connectivity issues for students, faculty, and staff, among others, who do not have access to the proper tools to participate in classroom instruction or complete their assignments.

We greatly appreciate this opportunity to comment on Senate Bill 66 and we applaud the sponsor for bringing this issue before the Legislature with a proposed solution that will be meaningful to so many Maryland residents.

For all of these reasons, MICUA requests a favorable Committee report for Senate Bill 66.

Comptroller testimony on SB 66.pdf

Uploaded by: Franchot, Comptroller

Position: FAV



Peter Franchot
Comptroller

TESTIMONY OF COMPTROLLER PETER FRANCHOT

Support - Senate Bill 66 - Department of Housing and Community Development - Office of Digital Inclusion - Established (Digital Connectivity Act of 2021)

Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

February 9, 2021

Chairman Pinsky, Vice Chairman Kagan and members of the Committee, it is my pleasure to provide testimony in **support** of **Senate Bill 66 - Department of Housing and Community Development - Office of Digital Inclusion - Established (Digital Connectivity Act of 2021)**. I would like to thank Senators Elfreth, Beidle, Eckardt, Griffith, Guzzone, Hester, Kelley, Patterson, Rosapepe, West, and Zucker for sponsoring this legislation.

Among other impacts, Senate Bill 66 creates the Office of Digital Inclusion in the Department of Housing and Community Development, requires the Governor to appoint the Director of the Office, and requires the Office to develop, by July 1, 2022, a statewide plan to ensure all State residents have the ability to connect to reliable broadband Internet by December 31, 2029.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a spotlight on one of the largest inequalities that exists within our state. The digital divide is a monumental barrier to economic equality, impacting both rural and urban areas, particularly low-income communities where lack of infrastructure and unaffordable Internet service plans are major obstacles.

As tens of thousands of students returned to school virtually this year, we've seen how the digital gap has further disrupted the education of Maryland children, making it all the more difficult to learn and succeed in already trying circumstances.

For the reasons stated above, I respectfully request a **favorable report** for Senate Bill 66. Thank you for your time and consideration.

###

SB0066 --02.09.21- Digital Connectivity Act of 202

Uploaded by: Fry, Donald

Position: FAV



POSITION STATEMENT

TESTIMONY PRESENTED TO THE SENATE EDUCATION, HEALTH, & ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL 66 – DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT - OFFICE OF DIGITAL INCLUSION - ESTABLISHED (DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY ACT OF 2021)

Sponsors: Senators Elfreth, Beidle, Eckardt, Griffith, Guzzone, Hester, Kelley, Patterson, Rosapepe, West, and Zucker

February 9, 2021

**DONALD C. FRY
PRESIDENT & CEO
GREATER BALTIMORE COMMITTEE**

Position: Support

The Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC) supports Senate Bill 66, which establishes the Office of Digital Inclusion in the Department of Housing and Community Development to ensure that every resident of the State is supported by high-quality broadband Internet service at an affordable price, and has the tools necessary to use and take advantage of the Internet. The legislation requires the Office of Digital Inclusion to develop a statewide plan to ensure that all State residents have the ability to connect to reliable broadband Internet by December 31, 2029. The plan is due on July 1, 2022.

Technology continues to develop at an exponential rate and digital access is an essential part of education, health care, workforce development, and business operations. The coronavirus pandemic has made fair and equitable access to the Internet more important than ever before. But it has also exposed major disparities regarding high-speed, reliable broadband home access among Marylanders:

- 18 % of all Maryland households do not have a laptop or desktop computer at home.
- 8,900 households in Baltimore City lack even a smartphone with broadband internet speeds.

It is even more alarming when you look at the breakdown of these statistics:

- 40% of the Marylanders who lack wireline broadband services are African American (African Americans comprise approximately 30% of the state's population).
- 75% of White households have wired broadband access compared to just half of African-American households.
- 75% of White households have wired broadband access compared to less than half of Hispanic households.

It is incumbent upon the State of Maryland to ensure that all citizens have an opportunity to learn, work, and have access to health care. According to the Institute for Emerging Issues at North Carolina State University, major network providers often engage in digital redlining – the systematic exclusion of low-income neighborhoods from broadband service and deploying only sub-standard low-speed home Internet. Similarly, a study conducted by Michigan State University reports that the lack of infrastructural support in rural areas

GREATER BALTIMORE COMMITTEE

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also prevents equitable high speed internet access. Marylanders should not be barred from essential services just because of where they choose to live. A statewide plan to ensure that all residents have the ability to connect to reliable broadband Internet allows us to address those challenges.

In the Greater Baltimore Committee report *Gaining the Competitive Edge: Keys to Economic Growth and Job Creation in Maryland*, eight core pillars were identified for a competitive business environment. An essential pillar is a highly educated and trained workforce to meet Maryland’s business needs. Reliable broadband service is key to ensuring that workforce.

SB 66 is also consistent with the Greater Baltimore Committee’s [2021 Legislative Priorities](#), as shown in the table below.

Greater Baltimore Committee 2021 Legislative Priority	Why SB 66 Helps Achieve the Legislative Priority
Advocate for solutions to accelerate economic recovery for small and minority owned businesses	Economic recovery is dependent upon providing businesses access to all available resources to allow them to be competitive
Advocate for inclusive policies that strengthen economic competitiveness and job creation	A competitive market, and thus a strong economy, cannot exist when high speed internet is unavailable in certain geographic areas
Strengthen education and workforce systems to prioritize equity, accountability, and alignment with Maryland’s high-growth industry sectors	High speed internet connection is an essential component of student success and workforce systems, and low-income and minority individuals are disproportionately impacted by the lack of a coherent plan for broadband in Maryland.

For these reasons, the Greater Baltimore Committee urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 66.

The Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC) is a non-partisan, independent, regional business advocacy organization comprised of hundreds of businesses -- large, medium and small -- educational institutions, nonprofit organizations and foundations located in Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Carroll, Harford, and Howard counties as well as Baltimore City. The GBC is a 66-year-old, private-sector membership organization with a rich legacy of working with government to find solutions to problems that negatively affect our competitiveness and viability.

SB 66_AFSCME3_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Gilmore , Denise

Position: FAV



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Patrick Moran - President

Testimony
SB 66 – Department of Housing and Community Development –
Office of Digital Inclusion – Established (Digital Connectivity Act of 2021)
Support

AFSCME Council 3 represents 30,000 State and Higher Education employees in Maryland. SB 66 establishes an Office of Digital Inclusion under the Department of Housing and Community Development that will be tasked with ensuring that every Marylander has access to affordable and high-quality broadband internet services. Our members reside in every jurisdiction in Maryland, and the lack of access to quality and affordable broadband is an obstacle in both rural and urban areas. AFSCME Council 3 supports SB 66 because it works to address long-standing equity issues with access to broadband. The digital divide excludes communities along racial, economic, and age lines. Many of the services AFSCME Council 3 members provide in our state government and at public universities are now accessible over the internet. AFSCME Council 3 believes that our state has an obligation to ensure all Marylanders can access these important public services without barriers.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also amplified the necessity of workers to have access to high-quality broadband in their homes. While teleworking, AFSCME Council 3 members have continued the vital work of processing unemployment claims, distributing SNAP benefits, assisting students with their enrollment questions, and monitoring domestic violence cases all while struggling to secure consistent access to quality internet. Additionally, with children also at home engaging in remote learning, many AFSCME 3 members who are teleworking are experiencing increasingly unaffordable internet bills and data caps.

SB 66 is important legislation to force the continued prioritization of expanding affordable, high-quality broadband to the hundreds of thousands of Marylanders statewide who continue to lack access. AFSCME Council 3 asks for a favorable report on SB 66.

Every AFSCME Maryland State and University contract guarantees a right to union representation.
An employee has the right to a union representative if requested by the employee.
800.492.1996

Find us: afscmemd.org
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SB0066-EHE_MACo_SUP.pdf

Uploaded by: Jabin, Drew

Position: FAV



Senate Bill 66

*Department of Housing and Community Development - Office of Digital Inclusion -
Established (Digital Connectivity Act of 2021)*

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs
and Budget and Taxation Committees

Date: February 9, 2021

From: Drew Jabin

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** SB 66. This bill would establish the Office of Digital Inclusion in the Department of Housing and Community Development to ensure that all Marylanders are supported by high-quality broadband internet access at an affordable price and have the tools necessary to use and take advantage of the internet.

Access to affordable, high-speed internet is vital for Maryland residents and the COVID-19 pandemic has clearly illustrated the necessity of being connected. Lack of broadband access continues to hurt Marylanders in their mission to move out of poverty, find jobs, obtain health care and social services, access distance learning, and advocate for community change. Access to broadband also supports a better-informed electorate, a responsive government, and enhanced civic engagement.

Broadband access is a public health issue, and one that is being recognized more often as a social determinant of health. The Abell Foundation's "Disconnected in Maryland" report shows that more than 500,000 Maryland households do not currently subscribe to wireline broadband services. MACo and county government stand ready to work with state policy makers to bridge the divide and provide residents the access they deserve.

While MACo understands the necessity of establishing an Office of Digital Inclusion that will work across all Maryland jurisdictions to provide support in increasing broadband adoption, we would like to acknowledge the importance of the current Office of Rural Broadband. Maryland's more rural jurisdictions face special challenges in terms of providing broadband access to remote and hard-to-serve areas and subscription rates in rural areas generally continue to lag behind rates in urban areas. MACo encourages the Committee to keep this in mind when moving forward with any legislation aimed at solving the digital divide in Maryland.

SB 66 takes an important step in furthering the State and counties' goal of providing broadband access to all residents. Accordingly, MACo urges the Committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** report on **SB 66**.

MAP Testimony - Support for SB 66.pdf

Uploaded by: Jefferson , Stacey

Position: FAV



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 66

Department of Housing and Community Development –
Office of Digital Inclusion – Established (Digital Connectivity Act of
2021)

Health, Education, and Environmental Affairs Committee
February 9, 2021

Submitted by Stacey Jefferson and Julia Gross, Co-Chairs

Member Agencies:

Advocates for Children and Youth
Baltimore Jewish Council
Behavioral Health System Baltimore
CASH Campaign of Maryland
Catholic Charities
Episcopal Diocese of Maryland
Family League of Baltimore
Fuel Fund of Maryland
Health Care for the Homeless
Homeless Persons
Representation Project
Job Opportunities Task Force
League of Women Voters of Maryland
Loyola University Maryland
Maryland Catholic Conference
Maryland Center on Economic Policy
Maryland Community Action
Partnership
Maryland Family Network
Maryland Hunger Solutions
Paul's Place
Public Justice Center
St. Vincent de Paul of Baltimore
Welfare Advocates

Marylanders Against Poverty

Stacey Jefferson, Co-Chair
P: 410-637-1900 ext 8578
C: 443-813-9231

E: stacey.jefferson@bhsbaltimore.org

Julia Gross, Co-Chair
P: 410-528-0021x6029

E: jgross@mdhungersolutions.org

Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) strongly supports SB 66, which aims to address the current digital divide through the creation of a new Office of Digital Inclusions to focus on developing a strategic plan to expand affordable and reliable broadband internet access to all Maryland residents.

Within the past year, the COVID-19 pandemic has served to highlight and exacerbate a plethora of inequities and systemic issues that have long existed within our society. Among these issues, inequitable access to broadband internet has risen become a major stumbling block to hundreds of thousands of households in Maryland as critical services have transitioned into remote and virtual settings due to the pandemic.

Whether it be virtual classrooms, online grocery shopping, or telehealth sessions, individuals and families across the state rely on stable internet now more than ever to maintain a safe and healthy lifestyle. However, too many households have been found to lack both the tools and internet connectivity necessary for daily life, leaving them unable to work remotely, apply for safety net programs, or access critical information about the current public health crisis.

The recent report from the Abell Foundation report, [“Disconnected in Maryland”](#), shows that close to 290,000 Maryland households were found to lack the tools for connecting, such as desktops, tablets, or laptops. Additionally, approximately 108,000 Maryland households with children under the age of 18 do not have wireline internet service at home, leaving these children vulnerable to education and homework gaps. Although these inequities are found across the state, they disproportionately impact low-income communities as well as African American and Hispanic households.

As our society continues to progress farther into the digital age, we must ensure that all Maryland families have the tools and internet service needed to maintain a healthy and productive lifestyle during this pandemic and beyond.

MAP appreciates your consideration and urges the committee to issue a favorable report for SB 66.

Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) is a coalition of service providers, faith communities, and advocacy organizations advancing statewide public policies and programs necessary to alleviate the burdens faced by Marylanders living in or near poverty, and to address the underlying systemic causes of poverty.

SB 66_FAV_MML.pdf

Uploaded by: Jorch, Bill

Position: FAV



Maryland Municipal League

The Association of Maryland's Cities and Towns

TESTIMONY

February 9, 2021

Committee: Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Bill: SB 66 - Department of Housing and Community Development - Office of Digital Inclusion - Established (Digital Connectivity Act of 2021)

Position: Support

Reason for Position:

The Maryland Municipal League supports SB 66 which creates a new Office of Digital Inclusion. The Office will focus on the important task of increasing broadband Internet deployment in the State; one aspect of which will be supporting municipalities with their plans to address broadband access locally.

The issue of access, or lack thereof, to broadband Internet has been spotlighted recently as many businesses and schools shifted to a heavily digital environment. Municipalities across the State are all unique, but a common thread is the demand for Internet access by their residents and businesses. Often the population and economic hubs of their area, municipalities need reliable Internet in order to maintain their vibrancy and to connect with friends, family, and customers outside the city.

In addition to tackling the important task of increasing access to broadband statewide, the bill assists municipalities achieve similar goals at the local level in several ways:

1. Development and deployment of digital literacy training.
2. Identification of specific areas of demand for Internet access.
3. Delivery of resources to local governments, such as grant funding application assistance.

The bill addresses the issue of statewide broadband access and provides assistance to municipalities, allowing for local governments to play their part in creating a solution. For these reasons we therefore respectfully request that the committee provide a favorable report on SB 66.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

Scott A. Hancock
Angelica Bailey
Bill Jorch
Justin Fiore

Executive Director
Director, Government Relations
Director, Research and Policy Analysis
Manager, Government Relations

SB0066_FAV_MACHC_Office of Digital Inclusion - Est

Uploaded by: Kasemeyer, Pam

Position: FAV



TO: The Honorable Paul G. Pinsky, Chair
The Honorable Guy Guzzone, Chair
Members, Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
Members, Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
The Honorable Sarah K. Elfreth

FROM: Pamela Metz Kasemeyer
J. Steven Wise
Danna L. Kauffman

DATE: February 9, 2021

RE: **SUPPORT** – Senate Bill 66 – *Department of Housing and Community Development – Office of Digital Inclusion – Established (Digital Connectivity Act of 2021)*

The Mid-Atlantic Association of Community Health Centers (MACHC) is the federally designated Primary Care Association for Delaware and Maryland Community Health Centers. As the backbone of the primary care safety net, Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) are united by a shared mission to ensure access to high-quality health care to all individuals, regardless of ability to pay. FQHCs are non-profit organizations providing comprehensive primary care to the medically underserved and uninsured. MACHC supports its members in the delivery of accessible, affordable, cost effective, and quality primary health care to those most in need. To this end, MACHC **supports** Senate Bill 66.

Senate Bill 66 establishes the *Office of Digital Inclusion* in the Department of Housing and Community Development. The legislation reflects the critical importance of working across all jurisdictions to provide Internet access and connectivity to all residents of the State. During this public health emergency, it has become increasingly evident that the lack of internet access and connectivity in many communities can have significant negative implications for the health and well-being of Maryland residents. Telehealth has become a critical component of the health care delivery system during this public health crisis. Its use has provided critical access to care for Maryland's most challenged communities. Telehealth has not only been essential during this pandemic, but the benefits telehealth has provided to enhancing access to care has clearly established the need to ensure that it is a health service delivery tool that should become a permanent component of Maryland's health care delivery framework. However, without a focused commitment to ensure all Marylanders have access to the internet, many medically underserved communities will not be able to take advantage of the expanded access to care associated with the use of telehealth. Passage of Senate Bill 66 will provide the focused attention on digital connectivity necessary to achieve the object of access for all. A favorable report is requested.

For more information call:

Pamela Metz Kasemeyer
J. Steven Wise
Danna L. Kauffman
410-244-7000

SB0066_FAV_MTC_Office of Digital Inclusion (Digita

Uploaded by: Kasemeyer, Pam

Position: FAV



MARYLAND TECH COUNCIL

TO: The Honorable Paul G. Pinsky, Chair
The Honorable Guy Guzzone, Chair
Members, Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
Members, Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
The Honorable Sarah K. Elfreth

FROM: Pamela Metz Kasemeyer
J. Steven Wise
Danna L. Kauffman

DATE: February 9, 2021

RE: **SUPPORT** – Senate Bill 66 – *Department of Housing and Community Development – Office of Digital Inclusion – Established (Digital Connectivity Act of 2021)*

The Maryland Tech Council (MTC) is a collaborative community, actively engaged in building stronger life science and technology companies by supporting the efforts of our individual members who are saving and improving lives through innovation. We support our member companies who are driving innovation through advocacy, education, workforce development, cost savings programs, and connecting entrepreneurial minds. The valuable resources we provide to our members help them reach their full potential making Maryland a global leader in the life sciences and technology industries. On behalf of MTC, we submit this letter of **support** for Senate Bill 66.

Senate Bill 66 establishes the *Office of Digital Inclusion* in the Department of Housing and Community Development. This newly created Office is essentially the renaming of the current Office of Rural Broadband coupled with a comprehensive enhancement of the Office's goals, objectives, and responsibilities. The legislation reflects a recognition of the importance of working, not only with the rural jurisdictions, but across all jurisdictions in the State to provide Internet access and connectivity to all residents of the State. The legislation also mandates funding in the budget to ensure the Office has sufficient resources to meet its obligations and achieve the legislation's notable goals and objectives. MTC looks forward to working with the Office and other relevant agencies to enhance and expand broadband access across the State. A favorable report is requested.

For more information call:

Pamela Metz Kasemeyer
J. Steven Wise
Danna L. Kauffman
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CC- SB 66 -Digital Inclusion Act - FAV.docx.pdf

Uploaded by: Klingenmaier, Lisa

Position: FAV

Senate Bill 66
Department of Housing and Community Development – Office of Digital Inclusion –
Established (Digital Connectivity Act of 2021)

Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs & Budget and Taxation Committees
February 9, 2021

Support

Catholic Charities of Baltimore strongly supports SB 66, which creates an Office of Digital Inclusion in the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) that is charged with ensuring that all Maryland residents are able to access reliable, universal, affordable, high-quality broadband internet service, and that they have the tools necessary to take advantage of the internet and its resources.

Inspired by the gospel to love, serve and teach, Catholic Charities provides care and services to improve the lives of Marylanders in need. As the largest human service provider in Maryland working with tens of thousands of youth, individuals, and families each year, we recognize how vitally important quality internet access is, and that with universal access, we can transform opportunities for our community members across the lifespan.

Each day, Catholic Charities staff interact with Marylanders facing challenges and difficulties, challenges and difficulties that have only escalated during the Pandemic. COVID-19 has laid to bare longstanding inequities in our systems, including inequitable access to reliable broadband internet. We strongly support SB 66, and the examples below outline how we see this legislation benefiting those we serve:

Ensuring access to telehealth care. We provide behavioral health care services across central and western Maryland, which includes utilizing telehealth technology. Without reliable broadband internet service for our clients, therapeutic relationship can be hard to foster and individuals or their children might forgo needed health services because they lack the tools necessary to engage in telehealth care. Increasing the infrastructure for quality, affordable broadband services is good for our State's public health.

Connecting loved ones to their family members in congregate settings. During COVID, we've had to be creative in fostering opportunities for our residents in our congregate care settings – seniors, individuals with disabilities, individuals experiencing homelessness - to communicate with their loved ones. While we've been able to bring in iPads and other tools into our programs for our residents, that doesn't always mean their family has reliable internet access on the other end. Today, the internet is necessary for communication, and lack of internet means lack of inclusion. Human connection is profoundly important, and dedicating resources to expand broadband internet access to all Marylanders would be transformative.

Creating opportunities for education and employment. As schools and work places become largely remote, reliable internet access is critical for economic security and opportunity. For Marylanders living in or near poverty, households often forgo internet access in order to pay for other basic necessities. A recent study shows that 23% of all Maryland households do not have home internet access, and 75% of those households live at or below the poverty line.¹ Moreover, the digital divide has a disparate impact on black and brown communities as 40% of households without internet are households of color.² Universal access to broadband internet would equalize economic and educational opportunities for children, individuals, and families across the state, as well as be a tangible step in the effort to dismantle the inequities born of structural racism and oppression.

On behalf of the individuals and families we work with, Catholic Charities of Baltimore appreciates your consideration, and urges the committee to issue a favorable report for SB 66

Submitted By: Lisa Klingenmaier, Assistant Director of Advocacy

¹ Disconnected in Maryland: Statewide Data Show the Racial and Economic Underpinnings of the Digital Divide. (2021, January). The Abell Report. https://abell.org/sites/default/files/files/2020_Abell_digital%20inclusion_full%20report_FINAL-web.pdf

² Ibid

ACLUMD_SB66_Favorable_Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Knowlton, Brianna

Position: FAV



Testimony for SB66 - Digital Connectivity Act of 2021

February 9, 2021

Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

Prepared by: Brianna Knowlton and Frank Patinella, ACLU of Maryland

POSITION: SUPPORT

The ACLU of Maryland works to ensure that all students receive a “thorough and efficient” education under the Maryland Constitution. During a time in which educational instruction is being delivered primarily through virtual means, the availability of and access to affordable broadband Internet services has become a vital requirement to fulfilling the Maryland Constitution’s promise to our students. To ensure that all students in Maryland have adequate internet service for their education, the ACLU supports the passage of SB66 - Digital Connectivity Act of 2021.

SB66 establishes the Office of Digital Inclusion as the successor of the Office of Rural Broadband and expands its scope of work to include collecting geographic and demographic data on households that must rely on mobile broadband due to insufficient Internet service; evaluating the reasons that state residents do not have adequate access to broadband Internet service; auditing the availability, reliability, and affordability of broadband Internet services statewide; creating a statewide plan to ensure all residents are able to connect to affordable, reliable, and universal broadband Internet; and collaborating with local jurisdictions, local education agencies, and the State Superintendent of Schools to ensure all Maryland students have the ability to access reliable broadband Internet.

The COVID-19 pandemic has pulled the curtain back on and exacerbated the already existing digital divide that affects students and their families. According to the American Community Survey (ACS), 13.6% of all Marylanders do not have broadband Internet service, amounting to over 800,000 residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019).¹ As for student connectivity specifically, there is no reliable data on how many students in each county and statewide are unable to attend classes virtually due to a lack of broadband Internet connection. Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Carroll County have acknowledged that they do not know how many families are without Internet service. In Baltimore City, it is estimated that nearly 20,000 households with school-aged children are without broadband Internet service or devices (Bowie & Reed, 2020).² In Allegany County, it is estimated that about 40% of

¹ U.S. Census Bureau. (2019). *2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates*. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/search-results.html?searchType=web&cssp=SERP&q=internet>

² Bowie, L., & Reed, L. (2020, September 08). Baltimore-area schools start the year with online education. Thousands of students lack a way to engage. Retrieved January 21, 2021, from <https://www.baltimoresun.com/coronavirus/bs-md-first-day-of-school-20200908-jcicvjt2eza5jbtzetcplrxvu-story.html>

households lack an adequate connection to broadband Internet (Bowie & Reed, 2020).³ Whether due to lack of affordability or lack of geographical accessibility, the lack of broadband Internet across the state is hurting our students. National studies have shown that by the end of the 2020-2021 school year, students could have lost five to nine months of learning on average, with students of color fairing far worse than white students by a difference of two to four months (Hettleman, 2021).⁴ While it is currently unknown what portion of this learning loss can be attributed to students' lack of Internet service and access to devices, we can expect it to have played a significant role. School systems and community organizations have done their best to get students connected; school systems have provided tens of thousands of students with laptops and WiFi hotspots, and organizations such as Elev8 Baltimore have installed their own WiFi hotspots in various areas of the city to get broadband Internet service to families and students. However, these efforts are unsustainable. Some students are still having to leave home and get close to their schools to gain access to Internet service, or even complete their school work from parking lots of various food service locations because that is their best option for accessing reliable Internet.

These issues persist throughout the State of Maryland, from its most rural areas to its largest cities. Since comprehensive data is not being collected statewide on digital resources, it is unclear as to exactly what is needed in various areas of the state to ensure students can attend online school and complete assignments. Consequently, the state and local jurisdictions cannot develop a comprehensive and efficient plan to close the digital divide. SB66 will ensure that comprehensive data is collected on the demographics of unconnected households, the non-promotional prices from broadband Internet providers, network performance metrics statewide, and the many reasons individuals and families lack broadband Internet service, and allow Local Education Agencies and the State Superintendent of Schools to bring the availability, accessibility, and affordability issues students and families experience in regards to broadband Internet to the forefront of the discussion around digital inclusion.

Students have already lost an unprecedented amount of classroom time, face-to-face contact with educators, and learning since the pandemic began in March 2020, and students will likely continue to experience compounded learning loss as schools continue virtual learning and even after they return to in-person instruction. The pandemic has led to a greater understanding of how to utilize the Internet for learning, and there is much talk about how to continue to use these online platforms post-pandemic to engage students during out-of-school-time hours. This would be in addition to the already increasing need for students to utilize the Internet to access resources, complete assignments, and further their education. The Internet can be an extremely useful tool to provide additional academic and behavioral support to students who are struggling, but it is only as useful as the amount of students who can reliably access it.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter, and we urge the committee to give SB66 a favorable vote.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Hettleman, K. (2021, January 04). Will the General Assembly Be Lost Over Learning Loss? Retrieved January 21, 2021, from <https://www.marylandmatters.org/2021/01/04/kalman-hettleman-will-the-general-assembly-be-lost-over-learning-loss/>

BEE Leadership Team Written Testimony – Digital Co

Uploaded by: Ko, Kelsey

Position: FAV

Written Testimony & Sign-On Letter: Digital Connectivity Act
Senate Bill 66
Baltimoreans for Educational Equity (BEE)
www.beequity.org

To Chairperson Paul G. Pinsky, Vice Chair Cheryl C. Kagan and Members of the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee,

We are the leadership team of Baltimoreans for Educational Equity (BEE). Baltimoreans for Educational Equity is an alliance of current and former teachers, families, students, and allies who work collectively to achieve educational equity at the district, city, and state level.

Today, we are asking you to vote to pass SB66, the Digital Connectivity Act of 2021.

Our past work includes coalition work towards securing:

- A \$30 million re-allocation of funds from Baltimore city government to city schools over three years.
- \$3 million for devices and internet for our young people to learn during the pandemic.
- A 50% increase in upload/download speeds on the Comcast Internet Essential plan.

This work occurred parallel to BEE's organizing efforts to advance the Blueprint for Maryland's Future.

I'm here on behalf of over 50 organizations serving the entire state of Maryland who support the Digital Connectivity Act of 2021.

BEE and these 60+ allied organizations spanning across the state believe that educational equity starts with resources that result from strong social infrastructure. The pandemic has exposed a number of shortcomings in that infrastructure, one of which is access to the internet.

The Digital Connectivity Act of 2021 would protect and enhance funding in public education upon implementation. It expands the duties of the Maryland Office of Rural Broadband towards increasing broadband access to people in urban and suburban areas of Maryland.

At the 2019 Digital Equity Summit, FCC Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel acknowledged¹ that digital inequity had been contributing to the learning gap, particularly as it inhibits students' ability to complete any paper-free homework assignments.

¹2019 digital equity summit in Richmond, VA
https://www.doe.virginia.gov/support/technology/edtech_plan/infrastructure_program/digital-equity/rosenworcel-remarks.pdf&sa=D&ust=1611240041988000&usg=AOvVaw1W4SbaOsmrCFxSsCJELIDK

A recently published report² by The Abell Foundation found that nearly one in four (23%) Maryland homes did not have broadband and two-thirds of those disconnected households live in metro communities or Baltimore City. These disconnected households are disproportionately (40%) Black. Furthermore, 20% of Maryland households with school age children do not have internet service at home. These households are disproportionately poor, African American and Latino.

In MD, we have particularly high chronic absence rates. According to Attendance Works, one of five students were absent prior to the closure of school buildings, an absenteeism rate slightly above the national average. Many educators are now seeing even lower rates of attendance due to the pandemic. Key barriers include lack of access to devices, broadband, technological literacy, and user ability, including but not limited to language barriers.

Many Baltimoreans for Educational Equity's (BEE) members are educators. We have firsthand experience with the reality of the homework gap, the phenomenon of children being unable to complete homework assignments online due to lack of connectivity, and other challenges of online learning for public school students. Here's a story from a constituent whose family has experienced this inequity firsthand:

My nephew was at risk of failing, missing many assignments, due to lack of consistent, strong internet access. Luckily, I am working remotely due to COVID-19 and took in my nephew Monday - Friday so that he could access my internet and computer in order to complete his past-assignments and attend digital instruction. His success shouldn't depend on an uncle who happens to work from home with the space to keep him overnight. Children should have steady, reliable internet access.

Teachers across Maryland log onto Zoom each day to show up for our students, and while Baltimore's students work diligently to access their learning, it is all too common for students to be kicked off multiple times during a class period or struggle to stay connected because their broadband speeds and bandwidth are inadequate, or because modern broadband infrastructure does not extend to their homes.

This is not just a problem in large cities. We know firsthand that the digital divide is disproportionately affecting rural communities as well. A report by Common Sense Media³ found that nationally, the households which are the disconnected span from rural (37%) to urban (21%) to suburban (25%). We can only assume something similar is true for Maryland.

² Disconnected in Maryland <https://abell.org/publications/disconnected-maryland>

³ Common Sense Media

https://www.commonsensemedia.org/sites/default/files/uploads/pdfs/common_sense_media_report_infographicfinal.pdf

The digital divide follows racial and economic lines across the state, and BEE and its aligned organizations believe that the Digital Connectivity Act of 2021 will be a foundational step towards addressing these pre-existing inequities in an effort to leave no Maryland child offline.

These digital equity issues ought to have been resolved years ago, or as soon as teachers began using online assignments of any kind to assess student achievement. However, it is now apparent that brick and mortar methods, paper methods, and any expected fulfillment of essential activities in person cannot be considered reliable means of providing adequate educational access to the people of Maryland.

The pandemic, in many instances, only made the existing barrier of limited broadband access more impactful for many people. The homework gap existed prior to the need for social distancing, and this country did not appropriately address this issue. The homework gap has now expanded to a learning gap and a retention gap as there has been no sufficient attempt to universally increase broadband accessibility.

Legislation designed to address universal broadband access is a necessary step towards addressing student achievement gaps while we are maintaining social distance measures and thereafter.

Sincerely,



Kelsey Ko, High School English Educator, Baltimore City Public Schools
Baltimoreans for Educational Equity Leadership Team
And on behalf of the undersigned organizations (organizational sign-on letter begins on page 6)

Undersigned Organizations & Agencies:

Baltimoreans for Educational Equity (BEE)
Advocates for Children and Youth (ACY)
AFSCME Maryland Council 3
American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Maryland
American Federation of Teachers (AFT) Maryland
Anne Arundel County Literacy Council, Inc.
Arts Education in Maryland Schools
Arts Every Day
Attendance Works

Undersigned Organizations & Agencies (cont'd):

Baltimore Digital Equity Coalition (BDEC)
Baltimore City Health Department
Baltimore Community Foundation (BCF)
Baltimore Family Alliance
Baltimore Teachers Union (BTU)
Betsy Dinkins Simon (BDS) Healthy Aging Networks
CASA
Catalyte
Disability Rights Maryland
The Education Trust
Greater Baltimore Urban League
Greatest Possible Good
Hinkey-Benson Family Fund
Impact Hub Baltimore
League of Women Voters-Maryland
Libraries Without Borders
Living Classrooms
Maryland Alliance for Racial Equity in Education (MAREE)
Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE)
Maryland Association of Counties (MACO)
Maryland Alliance Of Public Charter Schools
Maryland Center on Economic Policy
Maryland Coalition for Homeless Children and Families
Maryland Education Coalition (MEC)
Maryland State Education Association (MSEA)
Maryland State Family Child Care Association
Maryland Out of School Time Network
Office of Kristerfer Burnett, Baltimore City Council District 8
Office of Zeke Cohen, Baltimore City Council District 1
Open Works
Parent and Community Advisory Board (PCAB) for Baltimore City Public Schools
PCs for People Maryland
Public Schools Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM)
Project Waves
SEIU 500
SEIU 1199
SmartLogic
Urban Teachers
Teachers' Democracy Project
The Mount Royal School
The Parents' Place of MD
Strong Schools Maryland

Writers in Baltimore Schools
Waller Gallery
Warnock Foundation

To the members of the General Assembly:

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated pre-existing racial and socioeconomic inequities in Maryland. In an increasingly digital world, access to technology is vitally important for connection to educational curricula, job opportunities, health care, and relationships with loved ones.

The 2013 American Community Survey by the U.S. Census shows that lower-income and Black and Brown households are disproportionately disconnected from the internet. Furthermore, we know that Black and Latinx students are more likely to not have access to the prerequisites of learning—devices, internet access, and live contact with teachers. If we don't take action now, further learning loss and economic exclusion will translate into a wider opportunity gap and a decrease in Maryland's future economic growth potential.

The Digital Connectivity Act of 2021 (HB0097/SB0066) establishes the Office of Digital Inclusion and devotes capacity and funding for broadband access to all 24 Maryland jurisdictions. Increased broadband access creates new jobs, expands markets for new and existing businesses, enables access to educational opportunities and resources and facilitates delivery of health care services. As a result, It will improve long-term quality of life for all Marylanders and ensure that the State remains economically competitive both locally and globally.

This act also collects critical data around the root causes of digital inequity. We believe that this knowledge is necessary towards creating further policy solutions which will eradicate digital inequity.

The undersigned organizations composed of parents, educators, students and community leaders and groups urgently **call on the State Legislature to pass the Digital Connectivity Act of 2021 to address this immediate and pressing need.**

The crises in education and economic immobility began long before COVID-19. We must keep the gap from widening. We must act to equip all communities with the requisite digital tools, resources, and support for immediate and long term success.

With Urgency -

Natasha Escobar, Executive Chair
Baltimoreans for Educational Equity (BEE)

Undersigned Organizations & Agencies:

Advocates for Children and Youth (ACY)
AFSCME Maryland Council 3
American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Maryland
American Federation of Teachers (AFT) Maryland
Anne Arundel County Literacy Council, Inc.
Arts Education in Maryland Schools
Arts Every Day
Attendance Works
Baltimore Digital Equity Coalition (BDEC)
Baltimoreans for Educational Equity (BEE)
Baltimore City Health Department
Baltimore Clayworks
Baltimore Community Foundation (BCF)
Baltimore Family Alliance
Baltimore Teachers Union (BTU)
Betsy Dinkins Simon (BDS) Healthy Aging Networks
CASA
Catalyte
Disability Rights Maryland
The Education Trust
Greater Baltimore Urban League
Greatest Possible Good
Hinkey-Benson Family Fund
Impact Hub Baltimore
League of Women Voters-Maryland
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Maryland Alliance Of Public Charter Schools
Maryland Center on Economic Policy
Maryland Coalition for Homeless Children and Families
Maryland Education Coalition (MEC)
Maryland State Education Association (MSEA)
Maryland State Family Child Care Association
Maryland Out of School Time Network
Office of Kristerfer Burnett, Baltimore City Council District 8
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PCs for People Maryland
Public Justice Center
Public Schools Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM)
Project Waves
SEIU 500

SEIU 1199
SmartLogic
Urban Teachers
Teachers' Democracy Project
The Mount Royal School
The Parents' Place of MD
Strong Schools Maryland
Writers in Baltimore Schools
Waller Gallery
Warnock Foundation

Oral BEE Leadership Team Testimony – SB66 Digital

Uploaded by: Ko, Kelsey

Position: FAV

Baltimoreans for Educational Equity (BEE)
Oral Testimony in Support of The Digital Connectivity Act of 2021
February 9th, 2021

To Chairperson Paul G. Pinsky, Vice Chair Cheryl C. Kagan and Members of the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee,

I'm Kelsey Ko. I am an English teacher and the Digital Equity Chair for Baltimoreans for Educational Equity (BEE).

BEE is an alliance of current and former teachers, families, students, and allies who work collectively to achieve educational equity at the district, local, and state level.

Today, I come to you on behalf of our 800 members, and on behalf of the members of over 60 statewide advocacy groups to ask for a favorable report for **Senate Bill 0066 — The Digital Connectivity Act of 2021**

The BEE Leadership team and our 800 members have, in the past, organized Marylanders to center educational equity in our policy, including:

- Securing \$30 million from Baltimore city government to fund city schools over three years.
- Partnering with advocates across the city to secure \$3 million for devices and internet to give students and their families absolutely essential internet access during the pandemic.
- Organizing with partners statewide to pass the Casino Lockbox Amendment (Question 1) and to urge policymakers to pass the Blueprint for Maryland's Future

In March, classrooms closed and overnight teachers were forced to completely reimagine what learning could look like remotely. As a 9th grade teacher, I saw the inequities that already existed become more pressing as students and their families came to fully depend on limited resources like internet connectivity to live, learn, and work.

My students struggle to stay connected during virtual instruction. For one student, her audio fails because of spotty Wi-Fi, making it frustrating for her to engage in class and come off mute. For another student, his broadband connection is unreliable in supporting his Zoom classroom, much less the individual breakout rooms that are so critical for peer-to-peer collaboration and socioemotional development. Just last week, I had a student come into my office hours, excited to engage with me and chatting with me happily off mute. However, he was frustrated and kept cutting in and out because of his Wi-Fi. How much instructional time could

be maximized if I didn't have to ask students to repeat themselves because of lost connection? These are scenarios that have been repeated time and again, from student to student over the last 10 months.

If the Digital Connectivity Act of 2021 is passed — as students, parents, teachers and activists have been advocating — it would establish the Office of Digital Inclusion and devote capacity and funding toward broadband access across Maryland.

More than just a band-aid solution, this would also lead to the collection of critical data around the root causes of digital inequity, as well as the preparation of a statewide plan to ensure that Marylanders have access to affordable and reliable internet by 2029. But our children can't afford any more wasted time in getting connected to the digital age.

If COVID-19 has shown us anything, is that in this day and age, access to the Internet is a human right. Plain and simple. And as a human right, we must fight to make it a reality for our community members that need it the most: our working class neighbors, rural and immigrant communities, as well as Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color.

Without access, their lives and futures are at stake. Education, healthcare, housing, employment, all of it requires internet access these days — especially during this global pandemic — which is why closing the digital divide now and for all should be one of our greatest priorities. Maryland's future depends on it

Maryland's immense wealth and our spirited economy have not done nearly enough to provide what our children need — and not just children in Baltimore City, but in rural areas like Somerset, and Garrett, and Allegany counties. But there is hope for our kids, and it lies within each of you.

My students handle extraordinary adversity and responsibility as 14 and 15-year olds. They take on caring for their siblings and helping their parents around the house, all while navigating the grief, loss, isolation, and trials of virtual learning that this pandemic has brought about.

I ask you to empower students who shoulder so much but still soldier on — students who continue to try to access their education during these difficult times.

The children of Maryland are brilliant, resilient, and resourceful, and we do a disservice to not just those children, but to our future selves, by not equipping them with the tools they need to build the best future possible.

Please consider our future when issuing a favorable report for the Digital Connectivity Act.

Thank you.

Baltimoreans for Educational Equity (BEE)

www.beequity.org

Kevin Korneay Testimony SB66 02-05-2021.pdf

Uploaded by: Kornegay, Kevin

Position: FAV

Committee: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs
Chairman: Senator Paul Pinksey
Vice-Chair: Senator Cheryl Kagan

Dr. Kevin Kornegay
Director of Cybersecurity Assurance & Policy Center at Morgan State University

Testimony in Support of

SB 66 -- Department of Housing and Community Development -- Office of Digital Inclusion
Sponsor: Senator Elfreth, et al.

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee, 1 p.m. February 9, 2021

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Vice Chairman, and members of the Committee, for the opportunity to testify today. I support SB 66 for the establishment of the Office of Digital Inclusion. In the Department of Housing and Community Development. I hope that my testimony will be useful to you in your deliberations.

By way of introduction, my name is Dr. Kevin Kornegay. I am the Director of the Cybersecurity Assurance & Policy (CAP) Center and IoT Security Professor in the Electrical and Computer Engineering Department at Morgan State University.

Defining the "Digital Divide"

Interaction between humans and computers has dramatically increased as we embark on the twenty-first century. The ability to access computers and the Internet has become increasingly important to completely immerse oneself in the economic, political, and social aspects of not just America, but of the world. However, not everyone has access to this technology. The idea of the "digital divide" refers to the growing gap between the underprivileged members of society, especially the poor, rural, elderly, and handicapped portion of the population who do not have access to computers or the Internet; and the wealthy, middle-class, and young Americans living in urban and suburban areas who have access.

Factors Attributing to the Digital Divide

Although the number of Americans with access to computers and the Internet continues to soar every year, the digital divide also grows at an alarming rate. On the one hand, sections of society already connected - such as higher income, educated White and Asian Pacific Islander households - are adopting newer technologies faster and are connecting even more. On the other, groups with traditionally lower Internet and computer usage rates continue to lag far behind. Unfortunately, according to a study conducted by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), entitled Falling Through the Net: Defining the Digital Divide, the gap widens along already strained economic and racial lines.

Education

Widening education levels seem to magnify the digital divide; households with higher levels of education are increasingly more likely to use computers and the Internet. Data indicates that those with college degrees or higher are ten times more likely to have internet access at work than those with only a high school education. A study conducted by the NTIA from 1997 to 1998 determined that the gap in computer usage and Internet access widened by 7.8% and 25%, respectively, between those with the most and the least education.

Income

Not surprisingly, and in direct correlation to education, household income levels also play a significant role in the widening gap. Again, the study by the NTIA stated, "In the last year, the divide between the highest and lowest income groups grew 29%" (NTIA Falling through the Net 99). Also, households earning incomes over \$75,000 are 20 times more likely to have home internet access than those at the lowest income levels and ten times more likely to have a computer if living in the city or suburban area than in the rural area. Due to lower-incomes, poor neighborhoods lack the infrastructure available in affluent areas. Telecommunication facilities are more readily available for wealthier communities and are more attractive for developing companies to establish themselves. As a result, poverty in less fortunate neighborhoods makes it less appealing for outside companies' investments, further aggravating the divide.

Race

At the same time, the digital divide continues to widen along racial lines. The difference in computer usage grew by 39.2% between White and Black households and 42.6% between White and Hispanic families between 1994 and 1998. Hispanic households are roughly half as likely to own computers as White households. Interestingly, race affects the number of computers in the school. Schools with a higher percentage of minorities have fewer computers, whereas those with a lower rate of minorities have a more significant number of computers. As expected, the gaps between racial groups narrow at higher incomes but widen among households at lower economic levels.

Concerning Internet access, Black and Hispanic households are falling even further behind: access by White families grew by 37.6% between 1997 and 1998. Hispanic households are nearly 2.5 times less likely to use the Internet than White households. The NTIA study also demonstrated the racial disparities in Internet access exist irrespective of income. In a cultural study to determine the reasons for the divide other than income, the Hispanic, African-American, and Asian-American communities were studied. In the Hispanic community, computers are a luxury, not a need; computer activities isolated individuals and took away valuable time from family activities. Many in the African-American community have experienced negative encounters with technological innovations. On the other hand, Asian-Americans generally emphasize education, resulting in a larger number embracing rising technological advances.

What the Data Reveals About the Digital Divide

A Pew Research Center study shows that among U.S. adults with household incomes below \$30,000, 29% don't own a smartphone, 44% don't have home broadband services, 46% don't own a traditional computer, and 26% own a smartphone but don't have broadband internet at home.

Since 1994, NTIA has regularly commissioned the U.S. Census Bureau to conduct surveys on technology use. These surveys consistently show that Americans living in rural communities, and distressed urban communities, are less likely to use the Internet than those living in urban, more prosperous areas. Their most recent survey, conducted in 2017, shows that in households with incomes under \$25,000, only 6 in 10 reported using the Internet at home. Many Americans living in rural areas have limited options for broadband services, in contrast to those living in large cities. A recent Federal Communications Commission survey found that a quarter of rural Americans – nearly 17 million people – live in places that lack sufficient broadband availability.

Overcoming the Digital Divide: Establishment of the Office of Digital Inclusion (ODI)

As a whole, the digital divide remains an enormous and complicated issue - heavily interwoven with issues of race, education, and poverty. However, the obstacle is by no means impossible if broken down into specific tasks that must be accomplished. Aside from the obvious financial barriers, the following would help narrow the gap:

Universal Access

As the use of computers and the Internet increases, so does the necessity for access. In the public sector, policymakers and community members must recognize the importance of such resources and ensure access for all. While increased competition among PC manufacturers and Internet Service Providers has substantially reduced the costs associated with owning a computer and maintaining a home connection, for many households the costs remain prohibitive. Like basic phone service, the ODI should help to ensure Internet access for low-income households. At the same time, the private sector must commit to providing equal service and networks to rural and underserved communities so that all individuals can participate.

More Community Access Centers, Continued Support of Those Already Existing

Community access centers (CACs) are a critical resource for those without access to computers and the Internet at school or work; such programs should continue to receive funding to expand and strengthen. According to data collected in 1998, minorities, individuals earning lower incomes, individuals with lower education, and the unemployed - the exact groups affected most by the digital divide - are the primary users of CACs. Those using the CACs "are also using the internet more often than other groups to find jobs or for educational purposes" (NTIA Falling through the Net 99). Community access centers, therefore, are worthwhile investments. ODI will coordinate with CAC's to help close the gap.

Additional, Well-Trained Technical Staff

Computers and other technologies alone are not enough. Communities and schools must train more qualified staff and alongside new technologies to promote the best resources. In addition

to understanding the latest technologies, the staff must be able to teach others. ODI will provide oversight to ensure proper training statewide.

Change of Public Attitude Regarding Technology

At the same time, much of society needs to change its attitude concerning technology. Rather than perceiving computers and the Internet as a superfluous luxury, the public should view them as crucial necessities. The public must come to realize the incredible power of new technologies and embrace them as tools for their future and the future of their children.

My testimony here today justifies establishing the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, and I hope it has helped the Committee. Based on my knowledge and experience, I support SB0066 to establish the Office of Diversity Inclusion.

To the members of this Committee, thank you once again for the opportunity to provide testimony today.

I encourage favorable support of SB0066. Thank you for your consideration.

References

- [1] <https://www.ntia.doc.gov/category/broadband>
- [2] <https://www.ntia.doc.gov/category/minority-broadband-initiative>
- [3] <mailto:aveigle@ntia.gov>
- [4] <https://sites.ed.gov/whhbcu/>
- [5] <https://www.ntia.doc.gov/report/2019/ntia-minority-broadband-initiative-framework>
- [6] <https://www.ntia.doc.gov/print/speechtestimony/2019/remarks-acting-assistant-secretary-rinaldo-2019-carolinas-alliance-success>

SB66_IndivisibleHoCo_MichaelLoll.pdf

Uploaded by: Loll, Michael

Position: FAV



HB 97/SB 66– Digital Connectivity Act of 2021

Testimony before Senate Economics Matters Committee

February 9, 2021

Position: Favorable

Mr. Chair, Mr. Vice Chair and members of the committee, my name is Michael Loll, and I represent the 700+ members of Indivisible Howard County. We are providing written testimony today in **strong support of SB 66** to ensure all Maryland residents have access to high quality affordable broadband internet service.

According to [BroadbandNow](#), Maryland ranks third in the nation in terms of broadband access. Despite this high ranking, 201,000 of our residents do not have high speed (25 mbps) broadband, and another 130,000 lack any kind of wired internet connection. Many of these residents are concentrated on the Eastern shore and in the western part of the state, but there are poorer communities scattered throughout Maryland that either lack access to or can not afford service. About 65% of our residents can obtain low cost internet, far better than the national average, but this means 35% of the state's population does not have this option. Broadband access delivers educational opportunities, and those without it are unable to explore those opportunities. Businesses, especially small ones, rely on digital broadband access for advertising, customer contact, delivery, inventory management, and a host of other activities. Areas without this kind of service are at a severe economic disadvantage. We ask you to pass this bill to better educate our populace and to widen the scope of economic opportunity in Maryland.

We encourage a favorable report.

Michael Loll
Columbia, MD

SB 66.pdf

Uploaded by: May, Lisa

Position: FAV



Senate Bill 66 – Department of Housing and Community Development - Office of Digital Inclusion - Established (Digital Connectivity Act of 2021)

Position: Support

Maryland REALTORS® support SB 66, which establishes the Office of Digital Inclusion and directs the development of a plan to provide broadband services statewide by the end of 2029.

High-speed internet is an important and needed service which has become essential to daily life. This has become particularly apparent during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, as many employers have transitioned their workers from on-site work to telework and schools have transitioned students to distance learning.

Communities prosper when they gain access to high-speed Internet. Recent studies show that access to high-speed internet increases property values anywhere from 3-6%. The absence of broadband makes a community a less attractive location for new investment and prevents residents from locating in rural areas. Furthermore, availability of “new economy” jobs is impossible in a community with little or no broadband access.

Broadband is also a crucial tool for housing Maryland’s residents. Consumers increasingly use online services for at least a part of the buying or selling process. In 2020, some buyers completed their home purchase without ever setting foot inside the dwelling thanks to modern technology. Even before the current pandemic restrictions, many REALTORS® have experienced buyers cancelling a home purchase because the property lacked access to high-speed internet.

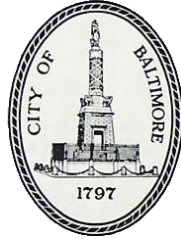
In the future, new technologies will be adopted that will only increase reliance on the availability of fast, efficient and cost-effective access to broadband services. For this reason, Maryland REALTORS® recommend a favorable report on SB 66.

For more information contact bill.castelli@mdrealtor.org, susan.mitchell@mdrealtor.org, or lisa.may@mdrealtor.org

SB0066-EHEA-FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Mehu, Natasha

Position: FAV



BRANDON M. SCOTT
MAYOR

*Office of Government Relations
88 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401*

SB 66

February 9, 2021

TO: Members of the Health, Education, and Environmental Affairs Committee
FROM: Natasha Mehu, Director of Government Relations
RE: Senate Bill 66 - Department of Housing and Community Development -
Office of Digital Inclusion - Established (Digital Connectivity Act of
2021)

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** House Bill (HB) 66.

SB 66 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. SB 66 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 SB 66 that would ensure a coordinated approach to expanding digital access and inclusion.

Accordingly, the BCA respectfully requests a **favorable** report on House Bill 66.

*Annapolis – phone: 410.269.0207 • fax: 410.269.6785
Baltimore – phone: 410.396.3497 • fax: 410.396.5136
<https://mogr.baltimorecity.gov/>*

MRHA SB66 - Department of Housing and Community De

Uploaded by: Orosz, Samantha

Position: FAV



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association

To the Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee

February 9, 2021

Senate Bill 66 Department of Housing and Community Development - Office of Digital Inclusion - Established (Digital Connectivity Act of 2021)

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, Senator Elfreth, and members of the Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 66 Department of Housing and Community Development - Office of Digital Inclusion - Established (Digital Connectivity Act of 2021).

MRHA supports this legislation that ensures that every resident of Maryland is supported by high quality broadband Internet service at an affordable price. During the COVID-19 pandemic it is imperative that every resident of Maryland have access to quality broadband services to support telehealth appointments, remote work, remote school, and a variety of other services that are offered virtually.

Rural Marylanders have constantly suffered from a lack of quality broadband services. Rural Maryland represents almost 80 percent of Maryland's land area and 25% of its population. Of Maryland's 24 counties, 18 are considered rural by the state, and with a population of over 1.6 million they differ greatly from the urban areas in the state.

One of these differences, according to Maryland law, is the "changing technological and economic conditions" and "deteriorating or inadequate communications" (West's Annotated Code of Maryland, State Finance and Procurement § 2-207.8b). In order to continue to deliver essential services to rural Marylanders, there is dire need in these communities for the implementation and maintenance of high-quality broadband services.

MRHA's mission is to educate and advocate for the optimal health and wellness of rural communities and their residents. Membership is comprised of health departments, hospitals, community health centers, health professionals, and community members in rural Maryland.

MHRA believes this legislation is important to support our rural communities and we thank you for your consideration.

Lara Wilson, Executive Director, larawilson@mdruralhealth.org, 410-693-6988

SB 66 -Digital Connectivity Act of 2021 - FAV - Ow

Uploaded by: Owusu-Acheaw, Pokuaa

Position: FAV

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 66
Department of Housing and Community Development - Office of Digital Inclusion - Established
(Digital Connectivity Act of 2021)

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs
February 9, 2021

Pokuua Owusu-Acheaw
Government Relations

The Maryland State Education Association supports Senate Bill 66 that establishes the Office of Digital Inclusion, in the Department of Housing and Community Development, to ensure that every resident of the State is supported by high-quality broadband Internet service at an affordable price, and has the tools necessary to use and take advantage of the Internet.

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 believes that broadband internet access should be a public utility, available to every community in our state. This bill adds a necessary addition to the establishment of the Office of Rural Broadband, because issues of broadband access are not exclusive to just rural communities. Beyond availability, MSEA supports legislation that addresses the broadband needs of students and educators. Additionally, MSEA is in support of the requirement that the Director of a to be formed Office of Digital Inclusion, created by this bill, coordinate with the Maryland State Department of Education, and more specifically the State Superintendent, to collaborate on the efforts of the Office of Digital Inclusion, to meet the individualized needs of local education agencies.

MSEA requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 66.

Baltimore Digital Equity Coalition Testimony SB66.

Uploaded by: Price, Tia

Position: FAV



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tia@digitalequitybaltimore.org

**Testimony SB66
Budget & Taxation Committee
February 5, 2021**

Position: FAVORABLE

Dear Members of the Department of Housing and Community Development:

The Baltimore Digital Equity Coalition (BDEC) connects committed organizations and individuals to coordinated efforts to advance digital equity and close the digital divide. A cohort of over 70 member organizations, BDEC works to address both the urgent and long-term need for increased digital access throughout the city of Baltimore. Initially formed as a “rapid response” effort in the wake of COVID-19 closures and shutdowns, the Coalition acknowledges the deep-rooted and systemic history of digital inequity and aims to close the digital divide in Baltimore by providing:

- **Access to Devices** – Ensuring affordable, available, and sufficient devices for all historically underrepresented residents, small businesses, and community organizations.
- **Greater Internet Connectivity** – Ensuring there are sufficient options for affordable and available internet connectivity for all.
- **Digital Skills Training and Technical Support** – Creating and delivering educational opportunities for all residents and ensuring technical support is available to all who need it.
- **Advocacy** – Engaging elected officials, civic leaders, and citizens most affected by the digital divide to advocate for equal access to computers, internet connectivity, and digital literacy.

For over 100 years, systemic racism has been prevalent in Baltimore City. Professor Lawrence Brown of Morgan State University refers to these racial disparities as “White L vs. the Black Butterfly.”¹ In the white L, well-to-do residents of Baltimore receive tax increment financing (TIF) dollars for development, have access to free buses, and well-resourced schools. Residents in the Black Butterfly, located in Black West and East Baltimore, pay for substandard services. Baltimore’s current infrastructure and fiber optic service availability in the city and surrounding counties mirrors the “White L vs. the Black Butterfly.

The Office of Rural Broadband currently has a narrow scope of connecting rural communities which continues to perpetuate systems of inequity. Nearly 40 percent, or 206,000, of Maryland’s Black

¹<https://www.baltimoresun.com/citypaper/bcpnews-two-baltimores-the-white-l-vs-the-black-butterfly-20160628-htmlstory.html>

households lack wireline broadband service connection.² Additionally, as of 2018 73.3% of white households in Baltimore City have this service compared with 50.2% of Black households and 46.4% of Latinx households.³ Without data illuminating racial disparities, narratives around access to broadband will be framed as a rural, white issue. With data, it is clear that Black and Latinx households are disproportionately disconnected.

BDEC urges committee members to firmly uphold the requirement to collect, analyze, and publicly share geographic and demographic data on broadband affordability, adaptability, and service quality. Digital equity is not confined to access to devices, broadband, and digital skills; digital equity is also readily available, transparent data that can enable communities to further engage in self-advocacy.

We respectfully request a favorable report for SB66 and the data-based metrics outlined which will inform a state-wide approach to ensure that all Marylanders, regardless of race, zip code, income level, education, or immigration status, will have the resources necessary to participate actively in modern society.

Sincerely,



Tia Price
Director
Baltimore Digital Equity Coalition (BDEC)

² (Horrigan, *Disconnected in Maryland: Statewide Data Show the Racial and Economic Underpinnings of the Digital Divide* 2021)

³ (Horrigan, *Baltimore's Digital Divide: Gaps in Internet Connectivity and the Impact on Low-income City Residents* 2020)

SB0066-MACC_FAV_B.Sadusky.pdf

Uploaded by: Sadusky, Dr. Bernard

Position: FAV



House Economic Matters Committee
TESTIMONY

Submitted by Dr. Bernard J. Sadusky, Executive Director

February 9, 2021

SB0066 – Department of Housing and Community Development – Office of Digital Inclusion – Established (Digital Connectivity Act of 2021)

POSITION: Favorable

The Maryland Association of Community Colleges, representing all of Maryland's 16 community colleges, strongly support SB 66, the Digital Connectivity Act of 2021. Equity and inclusion and the digital divide have been problems prior to our global pandemic and ones that will continue to persist after the pandemic is over if the State does not act now to put in place the necessary infrastructure to make a change. By establishing an Office of Digital Inclusion in the Department of Housing and Community Development, the State can begin to close the digital divide.

The COVID-19 impact has heightened how critical it is for our State and our communities to have reliable internet access. This has become a major clarion call for taking action. The Pew Research Center's most recent poll conducted in early April of 2020 reveals that 22 percent of families do not have reliable internet access and must use public Wi-Fi to finish their schoolwork. Maryland's community colleges have also experienced the lack of connectivity for students enrolled in our colleges. In response, the community colleges have set up public Wi-Fi hotspots in parking lots on campus so students can drive to the college and complete their assignments. The pandemic has exposed, almost overnight, how essential fast and reliable internet is for the productivity of our State and for our entire educational pipeline.

Racial inequalities also have impacted access to digital connectivity. This has tremendous ramifications for students of color and on economic opportunities as it can result in diminishing educational attainment levels. As our society shifts and changes, the State can no longer acquiesce to something that has become as fundamental to our productivity and educational goals.

MACC fully supports this legislation as a first step in addressing the long-term impacts of having a digital divide.

SB66 - Digital Connectivity Act - EHEA - Elfreth -

Uploaded by: Tulkin, Josh

Position: FAV



7338 Baltimore Ave
Suite 102
College Park, MD 20740

Committee: Education, Health and Environmental Affairs

Testimony on: SB66 “Department of Housing and Community Development - Office of Digital Inclusion - Established (Digital Connectivity Act of 2021)”

Position: Support

Hearing Date: February 9, 2021

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club supports SB66, establishing the Office of Digital Inclusion with the mission of ensuring universal access to high-quality, reliable, and affordable broadband internet.

Much of the value of broadband internet is well publicized. However, the burgeoning public health and environmental benefits are less recognized. Largely enabled by broadband, telework expanded dramatically in 2020 due to the pandemic. Much of that shift is expected to be permanent. Global Workplace Analytics (GWA), the widely cited research-based consulting firm focused on the future of work, finds that only 3% of those working remotely want to return to full-time office work and that employers can save an average of \$11,000 annually for each employee working remotely 2-3 days per week.¹ Telework in turn creates large public health and environmental benefits, stemming primarily from reduced vehicle traffic. Using GWA’s methodology², the potential *annual* impacts in Maryland are:

- 2 billion fewer vehicle miles traveled
- 128 million vehicle trips avoided
- 860,000 tons of greenhouse gases avoided
- Significant reductions in smog and other unhealthy air pollution.

The expansion of telework adds to broadband’s importance but threatens to widen the digital divide. Communities and individuals lacking access are now at an added disadvantage. Many rural areas lack affordable broadband, but gaps exist in every county and throughout the state among low income and disadvantaged communities. Notably, in Baltimore City, 96,000 (41%) of households in 2018 lacked wireline internet.³ Ensuring universal affordable access is central to improving social and economic justice.

Broadband internet is now fundamental for individual opportunity and Maryland’s economic prosperity while also improving public health and our environment. It is vital that *all* Marylanders have an equal shot at such opportunity and prosperity. We urge the committee to issue a favorable report on this legislation.

Charles T. Skinner
Transportation Committee
cskinne@gmail.com

Josh Tulkin
Chapter Director
Josh.Tulkin@MDSierra.org

¹ “The Business Case for Remote Work,” Kate Lister, Global Workplace Analytics, Jan 2021

² “2017 State of Telecommuting in the U.S. Employee Workforce,” Global Workplace Analytics and flexjobs

³ “Baltimore’s Digital Divide: Gaps in Internet Connectivity and the Impact on Low-Income City Residents.” John B. Horrigan, Ph.D. for Abell Foundation, May 2020

Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 75,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.

SB 66 Digital Divide.pdf

Uploaded by: Walmsley, Keith

Position: FAV



Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council

EMPOWERMENT • OPPORTUNITY • INCLUSION

Budget & Tax Committee

**SB 66: Department of Housing and Community Development - Office of Digital Inclusion - Established
(Digital Connectivity Act of 2021)**

February 9, 2021

Position: Support

The Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council (DD Council) has a mission to advance the inclusion of people with developmental disabilities in all facets of community life by eliminating barriers, creating opportunities, empowering people, and promoting innovation. This bill seeks to do just that. The DD Council is led by people with developmental disabilities and their families. From that perspective, **the DD Council supports SB 66.**

WHY is this legislation important?

- Access to reliable, high-quality broadband Internet service at an affordable price is important to all Marylanders, including people with disabilities.
- Maryland's citizens with developmental disabilities want and need to participate in everyday activities online.
- This bill helps to ensure affordable, reliable internet access for all regardless of zip code or income level.
- That could mean communicating with family, a healthcare professional, a bank or arranging a grocery delivery.
- Services and supports for people with disabilities, via the Developmental Disabilities Administration can be provided remotely and online.

WHAT does this legislation do?

- Establishes the Office of Digital Inclusion within the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) as the successor to the Office of Rural Broadband, albeit with expanded responsibilities.
- Requires the Governor to include sufficient funding in the budget to employ two additional staff members.
- The bill also repeals the Rural Broadband Coordination Board and the Rural Broadband Assistance Fund

The additional access the internet afforded by SB 66 is essential so people with developmental disabilities can access remote services and supports, telehealth, remain connected to family and friends, and be able to fully participate in a variety of activities.

Contact: Keith Walmsley, Director of Public Policy Initiatives
kwalmsley@md-council.org

CDN SB66 FAVORABLE.pdf

Uploaded by: Wilson Randall, Claudia

Position: FAV



**Testimony SB 66
Budget & Taxation Committee
February 5, 2021
Position: FAVORABLE**

Dear Chairman Guzzone & Members of the Budget & Taxation Committee:

The Community Development Network of Maryland (CDN) is the voice for Maryland's community development sector and serves nearly 200 member organizations. CDN—focuses on small affordable housing developers, housing counseling agencies and community-based non-profits across the state of Maryland. The mission of CDN is to promote, strengthen and advocate for the community development sector throughout Maryland's urban, suburban and rural communities. CDN envisions a state in which all communities are thriving and where people of all incomes have abundant opportunities for themselves and their families.

SB 66 would establish the Office of Digital Inclusion in the Department of Housing and Community Development to ensure that every resident of the State is supported by high quality broadband internet service at an affordable price and the tools to use the internet.

CDN will look to this office to: lead stakeholder engagement at the state and local level; collect reliable data on broadband deployment to effectively target funding; evaluate the impacts of grants and other activities; lead planning at the state and local to expand broadband availability in areas that lack it ; and secure and disseminate state and federal funds to expand broadband access.

In October 2020, CDN commissioned a report, "Disconnected in Maryland," by John Horrigan, Ph.D. The report found that more than half a million households in our state, nearly 1 in 4, do not have a home wireline broadband subscription. Two-thirds of those who are disconnected live in metro counties or Baltimore City. These households are disproportionately poor, African American and Hispanic. Of particular concern are children in poverty unable to access classroom instruction and older adults cut off from services of all kinds. Further, for workers of color, immigrant workers, and workers with limited formal education, digital access and skill gaps present immediate threats to their ability to sustain their families and make them less likely to reconnect to work once separated.

Individuals and communities need state policymakers to commit to creating digitally equitable systems in response to the Covid-19 crisis and beyond. Failing to act now will leave whole communities on the sidelines of the economy. As workers, training providers, and businesses scurry to keep essential services flowing, policymakers must return the favor by advancing and investing in the policy that will enable those essential workers to engage with the digital tools needed to thrive in our complex and fast-changing economy.

We respectfully request a favorable report for SB 66.

I have provided links to related reports on page 2.

Submitted by Claudia Wilson Randall, Executive Director, Community Development Network

Maryland Digital Equity - Understanding the problem Information

Below is a link to articles about the Digital Divide

CDN commissioned "[Disconnected in Maryland,](#)" by John Horrigan a report released in January that defines the hundreds of thousands of Maryland households, from Baltimore City to rural communities the lack regular subscriptions to broadband internet service, making it difficult for those households to take part in the digital economy, attend virtual school or take advantage of online resources, s gap and offers recommendations on how to solve it.

CBS Sunday Morning – Outlines the Broadband Problem simply in 9-minute segment
[The Great Broadband divide](#)

Pew Charitable Trust – [Key Elements Broadband Fact Sheet](#)

Here is [link to the forum](#) CDN held during Community Development Week October 2020.

Brookings Report – [Broadband Adoption is on the Rise but states can do much more](#)

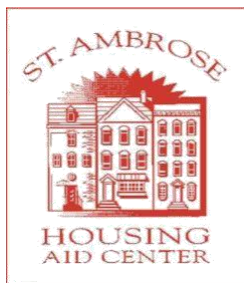
[The Cost of Connectivity Infographic](#) – Open Technology Institute

[Baltimore's Digital Divide: Gaps in Internet Connectivity and the Impact on Low-income City Residents](#) by John Horrigan

St. A SB66 FAVORABLE.pdf

Uploaded by: Wilson Randall, Claudia

Position: FAV



321 East 25th Street, Baltimore MD 21218
410-366-8550

**Testimony SB66
Budget & Taxation Committee
February 5, 2021**

Position: FAVORABLE

Dear Chairman Guzzone & Members of the Budget & Taxation Committee:

St. Ambrose Housing Aid Center (St. Ambrose) is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit, whose mission is to create and maintain equal housing opportunities for low and moderate-income people, primarily in Baltimore City, and to encourage and support strong and diverse neighborhoods. Woven throughout St. Ambrose's history is the commitment to advancing racial equity. Founded in 1968 to confront the pervasive redlining and blockbusting practices that discriminated against minority homebuyers, prevented the creation of intergenerational wealth building, and shaped much of the racist and segregated housing, education, and workforce systems the results of which can be seen in Baltimore today. For this reason, St. Ambrose remains rooted in its commitment to the pursuit of social and economic justice by providing innovative, comprehensive housing services.

St. Ambrose is in favor of SB 66, which would establish the Office of Digital Inclusion in the Department of Housing and Community Development to ensure that every resident of the State is supported by high quality broadband Internet service at an affordable price and, has the tools necessary to use and take advantage of the Internet.

St. Ambrose is keenly aware of the inequitable and unjust effects of the digital divide on the individuals and families with whom we work. St. Ambrose staff encounter individuals experiencing these effects on a regular basis as they work their clients seeking a stable home and a pathway to a better life. One recent experience is that of Ms. Addison, an older woman living in Baltimore City whose access to St. Ambrose's services could have been expedited if she had access to the internet. Ms. Addison needed home repairs that would enable her to remain in her home safely, to maintain her health during the pandemic, and—in the long term-- age in place in the community she loved. St. Ambrose administers a program called Housing Upgrades to Benefit Seniors (HUBS) that provides repairs and accessibility modifications to ensure Baltimore's aging residents are able to do just that. Because Ms. Addison was not able to access the Internet in her time of need, she was unable to access key information regarding social security benefits, which made her unable to complete her HUBS application. She was forced to travel to multiple locations in person, risking her health, to retrieve appropriate documentation in order to qualify for the program and receive much-needed services. If she had simply been able to go online, not only would she have become eligible for services more quickly, she would have been able to stay safely at home and not put her health at risk.

Ms. Addison- and the thousands of individuals and families St. Ambrose serves-- would see direct benefits from the establishment of an Office of Digital Inclusion. Maryland needs one central office dedicated to broadband expansion for the whole state.

We respectfully request a favorable report for SB 96.

Submitted by

Gerard Joab
St. Ambrose Housing Aid Center, Inc.

SB 66 - MoCo (GA 21).pdf

Uploaded by: Boucher, Kathleen

Position: FWA



Montgomery County

Office of Intergovernmental Relations

ROCKVILLE: 240-777-6550

ANNAPOLIS: 240-777-8270

SB 66

DATE: February 5, 2021

SPONSOR: Senator Elfreth, et al.

ASSIGNED TO: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

CONTACT PERSON: Kathleen Boucher (kathleen.boucher@montgomerycountymd.gov)

POSITION: Support with Amendments

Department of Housing and Community Development – Office of Digital Inclusion – Established (Digital Connectivity Act of 2021)

This bill establishes the Office of Digital Inclusion within the Department of Housing and Community Affairs (DHCA) for the purpose facilitating broadband Internet expansion throughout the State. Among other things, the duties of the Office include: (1) conducting a Statewide audit of the availability, reliability, and affordability of broadband Internet services; (2) creating a public map showing which residents lack broadband Internet access and the cost of broadband services in different areas of the State; (3) assisting local governments in their efforts to improve access to broadband Internet; (4) collaborating with school systems and community colleges to ensure that students have the ability to connect to broadband Internet; and (5) offering funding and technical assistance to help local governments and private entities qualify for federal funding.

Montgomery County strongly supports this bill with amendments that add the Maryland State Library and local library systems to the list of stakeholders with whom the Office must collaborate. Public library systems play an integral role in ensuring that all Marylanders, particularly those who do not have broadband access in their own homes, have free access to broadband Internet as well as programs that enhance digital literacy.

In implementing the bill, it will be important for the Office, in addition to prioritizing infrastructure expansion, to prioritize efforts to ensure that residents have access to digital devices and the skills and training that allow them to use the Internet effectively (e.g., daily living, education, telehealth, etc.) and to ensure that the data collection effort mandated by the bill includes the identification of people who do not have broadband Internet at home because they cannot afford it and not just people who lack access to broadband infrastructure. The Office must also include local governments, which operate community broadband networks that are used by school systems and community colleges, in their collaborative efforts with schools and community colleges to ensure that students have the ability to connect to broadband Internet. It is our understanding that these priorities are consistent with the intent of the bill but believe the bill could be amended to more clearly articulate these expectations.

The County respectfully requests that the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee vote favorable on Senate Bill 66 with the amendments outlined above.

SB0066- Department of Housing and Community Develo

Uploaded by: Davis, Charlotte

Position: FWA



John Hartline, Chair

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Email: rmc.mda@maryland.gov
Website: www.rural.maryland.gov
Charlotte Davis, Executive Director

POSITION STATEMENT

Senate Bill 0066 – Department of Housing and Community Development – Office of Digital Inclusion – Established (Digital Connectivity Act of 2021)

Before Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Matters Committee

January 29, 2021

The Rural Maryland Council **SUPPORTS WITH AMENDMENTS** Senate Bill 0066 – Department of Housing and Community Development – Office of Digital Inclusion - Established. The purpose of this bill is to codify the Office of Rural Broadband as the Office of Digital Inclusion. The bill provides a framework on the leadership, management, and duties of the Office; and repeals the Rural Broadband Assistance Fund and the Rural Broadband Coordination Board.

The Office of Rural Broadband was established by Executive Order in 2017 by Governor Hogan. The purpose of the Office is to ensure that every resident in the State 1) is supported in the adoption of reliable, universal, high-quality broadband internet service at an affordable price; and 2) has the tools necessary to use the internet and take advantage of internet resources. A goal identified in the Governor's Order was that high-speed affordable internet service would be available to every Maryland home by 2022.

To ensure that the work done by the Office of Rural Broadband continues into the future, the Rural Maryland Council recommends that the Office be codified in state statute. We strongly support the Office's efforts to encourage broadband expansion in rural areas. We also agree that more could be done to ensure that all Marylanders are able to access and utilize internet services in their homes and support the creation of a digital inclusion officer to address affordability issues. While the challenges of internet access span Maryland's urban, suburban and rural areas are the same, the solutions can be different.

The challenge to internet access for a rural area is mainly due to lack of providers willing to serve the area and a lack of physical assets. The solution for rural is a one-time expenditure of funds to build out networks and assets. Affordability is also an issue for rural residents; however, the solution is probably an ongoing monthly subsidy of services. The Council is concerned that the shift in focus to affordability may impact the Office's good work in the rural areas. We ask that uncodified language be included that retains the initial focus of the office and its rural lens.

We also ask that the Committees strike the repeal of the Rural Broadband Assistance Fund. This Fund has provided grants to local jurisdictions for construction and infrastructure projects related to broadband and is available to receive federal funds. Keeping the fund will also show to potential funders the State's support of rural broadband expansion.

We also have two small amendments:

- Strike the mapping responsibility as the Federal Communications Commission intends to update its mapping capabilities, and

- Require the Statewide Plan to be prepared on or before July 1, 2023. We believe in order to adequately assess and plan broadband expansion will require a minimum of 18 months. Given the effective date of July 1, 2021 a robust report will be possible by January of 2023.

The Governor has appropriated significant funding for rural broadband projects; many of which are currently under construction. The RMC values the efforts of the Office of Rural Broadband in assisting the more than 300,000 homes that lack access to broadband. Broadband is a critical infrastructure for business, education, health care and agriculture today and access remains a real issue in the state's rural areas for the almost 20% of rural residents who lack internet access.

The Council respectfully requests your favorable with amendments support of SB0066. Attached please find the proposed amendment text.

The Rural Maryland Council (RMC) brings together citizens, community-based organizations, federal, state, county and municipal government officials as well as representatives of the for-profit and nonprofit sectors to collectively address the needs of Rural Maryland communities. We provide a venue for members of agriculture and natural resource-based industries, health care facilities, educational institutions, economic and community development organizations, for-profit and nonprofit corporations, and government agencies to cross traditional boundaries, share information, and address in a more holistic way the special needs and opportunities in Rural Maryland.

“A Collective Voice for Rural Maryland”



John Hartline, Chair

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Email: rmc.mda@maryland.gov
Website: www.rural.maryland.gov
Charlotte Davis, Executive Director

**SB66 Department of Housing and Community Development – Office
of Digital Inclusion – Established (Digital Connectivity Act of 2021)**

Amendment Number 1

*Insert the below language as a new SECTION 5 on page 8 of the bill and
renumber the following sections accordingly:*

**SECTION 5. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That nothing in this Act shall
reduce the annual allocation of funds for rural broadband infrastructure
expansion under the Office or the discretion of the Director to implement
future programs for rural broadband infrastructure expansion.**

Amendment Number 2

*Remove the repeal of the Rural Broadband Assistance Fund on page 1 line 19
and 20, page 2 line 10 through 11 and on page 3 line 15.*

Amendment Number 3

*Remove the mapping responsibility from the Office on page 5, lines 12 through
16.*

Amendment Number 4

*On page 6, line 32 change the date from “2022” to “**2023**”.*

SB 66 Office of Digital Inclusion - Easton Utiliti

Uploaded by: Horner, John

Position: FWA



EASTON UTILITIES

Life. Made better.™

February 5, 2021

To: Chairman Pinsky
Members of the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

Subject: SB 66: Department of Housing and Community Development –
Office of Digital Inclusion – Established (Digital Connectivity Act of 2021)

Position: Favorable with Amendments

Dear Chairman Pinsky and Members of the Committee,

Easton Utilities supports the approval, with amendments, of Senate Bill 66, Department of Housing and Community Development – Office of Digital Inclusion – Established (Digital Connectivity Act of 2021). We have worked together with members of the Rural Maryland Council (RMC) to review this bill and support the amendments recommended by RMC in their separate testimony.

Easton Utilities is one of five municipally owned utilities in the State of Maryland, and we are the only municipal utility which provides internet, cable TV, and voice services. There are many residents in Talbot County and throughout the Eastern Shore of Maryland who still do not have access to broadband. It is vital to ensure the funding for infrastructure remains in place for any area of the State with accessibility issues.

Easton Utilities supports this bill's intention to fund and support those areas within the State of Maryland where affordability and literacy are very real problems. We see these issues in our existing internet service territory, so we provide a "lifeline" service option for our low-income customers. Easton Utilities has also partnered with Talbot County Public Schools (TCPS) and their education foundation to provide free internet services to students who are on the school's free or reduced lunch program allowing them to use the iPads provided by TCPS at home.

The Office of Rural Broadband has been very successful delivering on its current mission to provide funding for those areas with broadband accessibility issues due to limited or no infrastructure in place from an Internet Service Provider (ISP). Several areas of Maryland where no broadband infrastructure existed now have design or construction underway because of the

Office of Rural Broadband, but many areas still need this support. Addressing the affordability and literacy issues mentioned above cannot happen unless this critical infrastructure is already in place first.

There is language within this bill which has the potential to reduce or eliminate access to federal funding for areas of Maryland where accessibility remains the biggest problem. The amendments proposed by the Rural Maryland Council would address this issue while also maintaining the intention of the bill to support affordability and literacy issues throughout Maryland.

Chairman Pinsky, for the reasons stated above and in the interest of keeping the successful broadband infrastructure funding in place while also addressing the very real affordability and literacy issues in Maryland, Easton Utilities supports this bill, with amendments, and respectfully requests a Favorable report on Senate Bill 66 with the amendments recommended by the Rural Maryland Council included in the bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John J. Horner, Jr." with a period at the end. The signature is fluid and cursive.

John J. Horner, Jr.
Sr. Vice President & COO
Easton Utilities
410.763-9493

Cc: Hugh Grunden
Steve Ochse

SB0066- Department of Housing and Community Develo

Uploaded by: Matthews, Dakota

Position: FWA



John Hartline, Chair

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POSITION STATEMENT

Senate Bill 0066 – Department of Housing and Community Development – Office of Digital Inclusion – Established (Digital Connectivity Act of 2021)

Before Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Matters Committee

January 29, 2021

The Rural Maryland Council **SUPPORTS WITH AMENDMENTS** Senate Bill 0066 – Department of Housing and Community Development – Office of Digital Inclusion - Established. The purpose of this bill is to codify the Office of Rural Broadband as the Office of Digital Inclusion. The bill provides a framework on the leadership, management, and duties of the Office; and repeals the Rural Broadband Assistance Fund and the Rural Broadband Coordination Board.

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To ensure that the work done by the Office of Rural Broadband continues into the future, the Rural Maryland Council recommends that the Office be codified in state statute. We strongly support the Office's efforts to encourage broadband expansion in rural areas. We also agree that more could be done to ensure that all Marylanders are able to access and utilize internet services in their homes and support the creation of a digital inclusion officer to address affordability issues. While the challenges of internet access span Maryland's urban, suburban and rural areas are the same, the solutions can be different.

The challenge to internet access for a rural area is mainly due to lack of providers willing to serve the area and a lack of physical assets. The solution for rural is a one-time expenditure of funds to build out networks and assets. Affordability is also an issue for rural residents; however, the solution is probably an ongoing monthly subsidy of services. The Council is concerned that the shift in focus to affordability may impact the Office's good work in the rural areas. We ask that uncodified language be included that retains the initial focus of the office and its rural lens.

We also ask that the Committees strike the repeal of the Rural Broadband Assistance Fund. This Fund has provided grants to local jurisdictions for construction and infrastructure projects related to broadband and is available to receive federal funds. Keeping the fund will also show to potential funders the State's support of rural broadband expansion.

We also have two small amendments:

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- Require the Statewide Plan to be prepared on or before July 1, 2023. We believe in order to adequately assess and plan broadband expansion will require a minimum of 18 months. Given the effective date of July 1, 2021 a robust report will be possible by January of 2023.

The Governor has appropriated significant funding for rural broadband projects; many of which are currently under construction. The RMC values the efforts of the Office of Rural Broadband in assisting the more than 300,000 homes that lack access to broadband. Broadband is a critical infrastructure for business, education, health care and agriculture today and access remains a real issue in the state's rural areas for the almost 20% of rural residents who lack internet access.

The Council respectfully requests your favorable with amendments support of SB0066. Attached please find the proposed amendment text.

The Rural Maryland Council (RMC) brings together citizens, community-based organizations, federal, state, county and municipal government officials as well as representatives of the for-profit and nonprofit sectors to collectively address the needs of Rural Maryland communities. We provide a venue for members of agriculture and natural resource-based industries, health care facilities, educational institutions, economic and community development organizations, for-profit and nonprofit corporations, and government agencies to cross traditional boundaries, share information, and address in a more holistic way the special needs and opportunities in Rural Maryland.

“A Collective Voice for Rural Maryland”



John Hartline, Chair

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**SB66 Department of Housing and Community Development – Office
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Horrigan_SB66_Disconnected_Maryland.pdf

Uploaded by: Horrigan, John

Position: INFO

Testimony of John B. Horrigan, PhD
on SB 66, the Digital Connectivity Act of 2021

“Disconnected in Maryland”

February 2021

As the author of the report [“Disconnected in Maryland,”](#) I am pleased to offer my perspective on Maryland’s digital divide. With school, health care appointments, and work going online in light of the pandemic, reliance on the internet has grown. Lacking online access has gone from being a costly inconvenience to a debilitating disadvantage. This has put “digital inclusion” – whether people have the digital tools and the tech support to use the internet – squarely in the spotlight. “Disconnected in Maryland” is an empirical analysis of the nature and size of internet gaps among Maryland households. The report’s findings align with the goals of the Digital Connectivity Act of 2021. They also point to additional steps to ensure that the internet is a force for equity and opportunity for more Maryland households.

Addressing digital connectivity gaps starts with metrics. Should we focus on whether people have sufficient network connectivity where they live, that is, whether their homes are served by network infrastructure that is fast enough to carry out online tasks? Or should the attention be on subscriptions and computers, that is, the rate at which people subscribe to high-speed internet service at home and whether they have computing devices for access?

Both access (whether a network of sufficient quality serves a household) and adoption (whether a household subscribes to service) are important. In recent years, policymakers at the national level have viewed the digital divide as a problem of network deployment in rural areas. This overlooks another (and substantial) dimension of the digital divide – household subscriptions to service and home computer ownership. That is the story that the “Disconnected in Maryland” tells.

Two-thirds of those without meaningful online access live in cities and metro areas

Hundreds of thousands of households in Maryland do not have a foundational tool for internet connectivity – a wireline high-speed internet subscription for their home. Such internet service plans have the speed and data allotments that allow people to log on for school, work from home, or have a telehealth session – all without worrying whether they will hit a monthly limit on the amount of data they can consume (a feature of most wireless data plans). “Disconnected in Maryland” demonstrates how the digital divide is more prevalent in metro and urban areas, as well as for low-income and African American Marylanders:

- 520,000 Maryland households do not have a home wireline broadband subscription. That is nearly one in four (23%) homes.
- Two-thirds – or 342,000 – of the disconnected live in metro counties or Baltimore City.
- 206,000 African American households without a wireline broadband connection in Maryland. This means 40% of the disconnected in Maryland are African American.
 - Two other groups – Hispanics and Native Americans – also have wireline adoption rates below the state average.
- 178,000 households in rural Maryland do not have wireline broadband subscriptions at home.

- Some 108,000 Maryland households with children under the age of 18 do not have wireline internet service at home. These households suffering from the “homework gap” are disproportionately poor, African American, and Hispanic.

Internet access means very little without a computing device to log on and there are sizable gaps in computer ownership in the Maryland.

- 391,000 Maryland homes do not have either a desktop or laptop computer, or nearly one in five (18%) homes.
- Nearly 290,000 Maryland households lack either a desktop, laptop, or tablet computer (or 13% of all homes).
- As with wireline broadband subscriptions, the weight of these gaps falls heavily in urban and metro areas and among African American households.

Reasons for gaps

Shortfalls in home broadband subscription and computer ownership rest on two factors: affordability and digital readiness.

Affordability

Income is the most prominent predictor of whether a household has a high-speed internet subscription at home. Fewer than half (46.8%) of all Maryland household whose incomes are \$25,000 per year or less have a high-speed subscription – far below the rate for well-off households (90.8% of households whose incomes exceed \$150,000 annually have service). The gaps are greatest in Baltimore City, where just 31.8% of low-income households subscribe to high-speed service. Low-income rural areas are also hard hit. Some 42.2% of low-income households subscribe to high-speed service in Allegany, Caroline, Cecil, Dorchester, Garrett, Queen Anne’s, Somerset, Talbot, Washington Wicomico, and Worcester counties.

Digital readiness

The second issue with broadband adoption at home is “[digital readiness](#).” Digital readiness refers to the skills needed to use digital tools to find, evaluate, create, and share information. It includes information literacy – the ability to interpret online content and judge the reliability of it. Insufficient digital readiness is widespread. As much as [half of the population](#) exhibit some level of reluctance to use online educational resources because they lack confidence on how to use such applications. [Research shows](#) digital skills training can improve digital readiness; those with digital skills training use the internet for education and job search at significantly higher rates than those who have not had such training. Investment in community institutions such as local non-profits and public libraries is the way to reach populations in need of this training.

Recommendations: Prioritizing digital inclusion

The “Disconnected in Maryland” is not just about identifying gaps. It also provides recommendations on how Maryland can foster digital inclusion in the state. Establishing an Office of Digital Inclusion, as HB97 proposes, is an ingredient in a larger set of initiatives Maryland policymakers should consider.

Statewide planning: The state should embark on a statewide broadband planning process to address all dimensions of the problem, i.e., promoting internet adoption and computer ownership, as well as network deployment.

Partnerships for digital inclusion: Maryland should consider investments in digital inclusion, perhaps in partnership with philanthropic organizations. The state should also consider creating an Office of Digital Inclusion to manage initiatives throughout the state and serve as a conduit for community grants to address the skills gaps that are part of people's deficiencies in digital readiness.

Increasing public awareness of affordability programs: Many carriers offer discount internet service for qualifying low-income homes. Stakeholders should promote awareness of them and explore ways (e.g., working with school districts or housing authorities) to make signing up for service easier.

Improving the pipeline of computing devices: Affordability of computers is commonly cited as a reason people do not subscribe to home wireline service and initiatives exist (nationally and in Maryland) to help get computers to low-income households. Stakeholders should explore ways to expand them to all parts of the state to meet demands that the pandemic has spurred.

Although interest in the digital divide has grown since the pandemic, the problem will not fade when the pandemic does. Economic recovery will take time, which means affordability of service will continue to be a problem among low-income Marylanders. The recovery will also depend upon widespread adoption and use of digital tools. The COVID recession is a "reallocation shock" in that as many as [one-third of jobs](#) lost during pandemic may not come back at all. This means those who have lost jobs will need to switch occupations. Many [in-demand jobs](#) require digital skills and come with the expectation that workers have robust home connectivity. Building the state's capacity to help people gain connectivity and digital skills will contribute to a healthier and more equitable Maryland.

About the report and the author

John B. Horrigan, PhD is Senior Fellow at the Technology Policy Institute, with a focus on technology adoption and digital inclusion. Additionally, he has served as an Associate Director for Research at the Pew Research Center, where he focused on libraries and their impact on communities. During the Obama Administration, Horrigan was part the leadership team at the Federal Communications Commission for the development of the National Broadband Plan. Views expressed in this testimony are his own.

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BILL NO.: Senate Bill 66

COMMITTEE: Senate Committee on Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

TITLE: Department of Housing and Community Development - Office of Digital Inclusion - Established (Digital Connectivity Act of 2021)

SPONSORS: Sen. Elfreth

Letter of Information

Description of Bill:

House Bill 97 codifies the existing Office of Rural Broadband, and renames it the Office of Digital Inclusion. House Bill 97 also expands the purposes of the Office to include facilitating access to high speed internet access for households in currently served areas of the state, providing digital education measures, and developing more granular mapping of broadband service than is currently publicly available. This bill would require the future budgets to include funding for the Office sufficient to hire two additional employees.

Background:

In 2017, Governor Hogan established the Governor's Office of Rural Broadband with the goal of facilitating high speed internet service in all corners of the State. That office is supported by the Department of Housing and Community Development and funded through appropriations to the agency for operating and capital expenses. Discussion of creating a new office for these purposes should take into account the existing work that is done by the Office of Rural Broadband.

Though the Office was originally tasked exclusively with the development of broadband infrastructure in unserved parts of the state, since the early days of the pandemic the Office has taken on a larger role, providing emergency funding to school districts and libraries to help facilitate student access to broadband for remote learning and initiating the build out of a wireless network for students.

Through funding, expertise and partnerships with local jurisdictions and internet service providers (ISP), the Office enables broadband expansion to unserved and underserved rural households and businesses. Since the Office's inception, several successful programs have been developed and implemented to further the Office's mission. What follows is a description of some of the Office's work, as well as a synopsis of currently and soon to be available mapping data.

Assistance for Federal Funding Applications

In order to best leverage its state funding, the Office has worked with multiple counties and their ISP partners to facilitate their applications for federal broadband funding. In one example, Talbot County's partner, Easton Utilities received a \$13 million grant from USDA to construct a broadband network that will provide service to approximately 90% of the unserved rural households in Talbot County. That federal funding award was enabled by approximately \$81,000 in State funding through the Office.

The Office continues to offer technical and financial assistance for federal funding efforts.

Expansion of Existing Broadband Networks grant program (formerly the Broadband Pilot Program)

This grant program, established in FY19, has been popular with local jurisdictions and successful in extending existing broadband facilities into nearby unserved neighborhoods. The program offers funding of up to \$200,000 for 50% or less of the project capital costs. It requires local jurisdictions to partner with an ISP and submit a joint application with the local jurisdiction being the lead applicant. This application structure helps the local jurisdiction guide where service will be extended and allows them to better serve their constituents.

In FY19, the program provided over \$600,000 in funding to five counties for eight projects. In FY20 the program expanded to include applications from eight counties and one city and funded 19 projects and provided \$2.1 million in funding. Applications for the FY21 program recently closed with 12 Counties applying for 36 projects requesting over \$4.3 million in funding.

Broadband Infrastructure grant program

This grant program was established in FY20 to provide funding for major new broadband networks necessary to provide access to broadband for rural unserved households. The program offers funding of \$1 million to \$3 million for 50% or less of the project capital costs. ISP's apply for funding directly and must show a partnership has been established with the local jurisdiction.

In FY20, the program provided over \$7.4 million for four projects that will provide broadband access to over 3,700 premises. The application for this program is open through January 29, 2021.

Emergency Broadband Education Assistance Grants

These grants were offered to school districts and libraries in early April to expand their existing broadband networks and offerings to allow students additional ways to access the internet to participate in online learning. Grants were provided to pay for external wireless access points on buildings as well as the purchase of cellular hotspots for student use. Over \$200,000 was provided to five libraries and four school districts.

Broadband for Unserved Students

Governor Hogan directed Coronavirus Relief Funds be provided to assist with internet connectivity for unserved students all across Maryland. The program provided over \$8.7 million in funding to 22 school districts across the State for the purchase and deployment of cellular hotspots or to pay for installation and service for households lacking service where a provider was available.

Wireless Broadband Education Network

Using \$15 million in funding provide through the Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund (GEER), the Office in partnership with Collaborative Solutions Maryland (a 501(c)3 corporation formed by the Maryland Research and Education Network) has begun the process of constructing a statewide wireless network to serve unserved students. This new network will utilize existing state vertical and fiber optic resources to provide broadband services for education to our unserved rural and urban students. It is expected to be operational for the 2022 school year.

Broadband Mapping

In addition to the duties of the Office, some background on current broadband access mapping may be useful to you in your deliberations. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) requires internet service providers to share with them information on Census blocks where fixed residential broadband services of at least 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload are currently available or able to be provided imminently. This data is useful in a broader context, but cannot provide household or street level data, which is necessary to determine the precise scope of served/unserved residents. In the recently passed Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, Congress provided the FCC with \$65 million to develop more precise and accurate data through the Commission's Digital Opportunity Data Collection plan. It is our expectation that this more granular information should be available within about one year.