



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
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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:

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