



Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council

EMPOWERMENT • OPPORTUNITY • INCLUSION

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
SB 770: Education – Technology Resources – Funding (Ending the Digital Divide Act)
March 4, 2021
Letter of Information

The Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council (DD Council) has invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in broadband and technology access since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes getting technology into the hands of some of Maryland's most underserved citizens. The Council was on the frontline in addressing the emergent need of students and families last year as remote schooling became a reality. Access to internet is critical for all people, including people with developmental disabilities. The aims of this bill are timely and laudable.

This important legislation centers the reality, brought into sharp focus by the pandemic that 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. With greater access, people can communicate with family, a healthcare professional, a bank, or arrange a grocery delivery, among other things. Many people with disabilities receive services and supports via the Developmental Disabilities Administration can be provided remotely and online.

The pathway to ending the digital divide that this bill would make law would require each county board of education to use not less than 7% of the target per pupil foundation amount to provide technology to students. Additionally, it authorizes a local school system, at the end of each fiscal year, to hold unused funds in a special fund to be used in a subsequent fiscal year and requires a county board that allocates technology funding to follow IT security standards.

The legislature worked hard to pass the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. That bill was the result of a years long deep-dive into our State and local education funding. It is imperative that Maryland holds fast to its' commitments to all children, at the levels of funding best determined to meet their needs.

This bill opens an important conversation about a valid and real issue. How do we get technology into the hands of kids who need it? It asks a second question of what will be taken away to make that possible?

Additional access the internet is essential so children with developmental disabilities can access remote schooling, remain connected to extra-curricular activities and friends, and be able to fully participate in a meaningful range of interactions.

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