

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.

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