



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 .

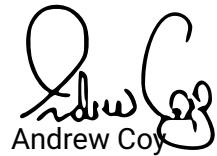
Of critical importance to addressing the issues that have led to lack of Internet Access, it stands to reason that policy makers need access to more information than is currently available and that this should be accomplished by the creation of "Report Card" in which performative data from Internet Service 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 stylized with a large, looping initial "A" and a prominent "C".

Andrew Coy
Executive Director
Digital Harbor Foundation