



Maryland Community Health System

Committee: House Economic Matters Committee

Bill Number: House Bill 43 – Department of Information Technology – Office of Broadband and
Joint Committee on Broadband

Hearing Date: January 26, 2021

Position: Support

The Maryland Community Health System (MCHS) supports *House Bill 43 – Department of Information Technology – Office of Broadband and Joint Committee on Broadband*. The bill expands the State's efforts to support broadband in rural areas to suburban and urban communities. The bill establishes the Office of Broadband under the Department of Housing and Community Development. The bill also establishes a joint legislative committee to oversee broadband policy in Maryland.

MCHS is a network of federally qualified health centers serving communities which have limited transportation and technology resources. During the pandemic, telehealth has been a critical tool in ensuring Marylanders continued to receive health care services. Many of our health centers have reported that up to 50% of their visits were provided through a telehealth platform when the pandemic first began. Our recent experience demonstrates the value of telehealth in the long-term. Telehealth is a critical tool to manage chronic conditions such as diabetes and hypertension. In addition, telehealth has proved to be an essential means of communication with patients facing behavioral health challenges.

Implementation of telehealth has been hampered by broadband challenges across the state. We support the bill because it broadens and enhances the State's efforts to ensure broadband is access to all communities – rural, suburban, and urban. While the past nine months have been challenging, the State has learned many lessons about disparities in broadband access. We can use those lessons to advance more comprehensive solutions for Maryland.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony, and we urge a favorable vote. If we can provide any further information, please contact Robyn Elliott at relliott@policypartners.net or (443) 926-3443.

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