



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

February 16th, 2023

HB 551

Broadband Expansion Incentive Act of 2023

House Ways & Means Committee

Position: Favorable

The Catholic Conference is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals, and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

House Bill 551 would allow a subtraction modification under the Maryland income tax for certain qualified broadband grants awarded during the taxable year for broadband deployment and it would provide an exemption from the sales and use tax for the sale of certain equipment related to providing Internet service and deploying broadband.

Particularly in Maryland's lower-income communities, digital inequity is a problem in need of a solution. House Bill 551, through its focus on the expansion of affordable internet access, would provide significant means toward those ends. Access affordability is one of the primary catalysts in the digital divide.

Access to internet service and technology are key components to a high-quality education today. It is through access to a high-quality education that the cycle of poverty is broken in our low-income, marginalized communities. Our state should do all that it can to promote successful educational outcomes for children who might otherwise be deprived of the same opportunities as their wealthier counterparts. Pope Francis has stated that the Church should highly value education, leading to gainful employment, as it is through the same that "human beings express and enhance the dignity of their lives." (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 192).

The Conference appreciates your consideration and respectfully urges a **favorable** report for House Bill 551.