

Good afternoon Chair and members,

My name is Siobhan Hayes, I am the Tech Lab Director at Digital Harbor Foundation. I am here today to speak in favor of SB980.

Digital Harbor Foundation is a nonprofit organization focused on disrupting the root causes of the digital divide. Our work focuses on promoting digital inclusion through developing innovative, equity-based STEM learning experiences for youth, educators, organizations, and communities.

We empower youth to be *creators* of technology rather than *consumers* of technology.

In our Tech Center in the Federal Hill neighborhood of Baltimore we serve approximately 400 youth per year in addition to offering professional development for educators both locally and across the country.

Each day, youth discover their own capacity to create and love of computer science through our afterschool program in topics such as robotics, coding, and 3-D design.

Baltimore youth systemically lack STEM education opportunities that would lead them to access economic opportunities available in their own community.

This lagging investment in STEM education disproportionately impacts youth who are already underrepresented in STEM fields, especially youth of color, females, and youth with disabilities and from low income families. As Baltimore's tech sector continues to grow, ignoring or leaving behind these populations will result in even greater disparities in Baltimore's workforce.

By requiring public high schools to reflect the demographic composition of the school in their computer science enrollments, this bill directly addresses these inequities.

The bill mandates that the State Board of Education update computer science content standards to include recent advances in the field, such as artificial intelligence and cybersecurity. This ensures that students in Baltimore City, a federally designated Tech Hub, are receiving instruction that is not only relevant but also provides them with the skills needed to access and thrive in the modern workforce.

Many Baltimore-area schools and teachers struggle to integrate technology into their classrooms and curriculum. The Maryland General Assembly found that 78% of Baltimore City schools do not offer any computer science courses. The requirement for county boards of education to provide developmentally appropriate computer science instruction in public elementary and middle schools is particularly significant for Baltimore City, where early exposure to computer science can help bridge the gap in technology skills and prepare students for future success. Youth start to develop STEM identity during preadolescence, highlighting the importance of increasing exposure to computer science in the early grades

Senate Bill 980 is a critical step towards equity. It has the potential to open doors to new opportunities, empower our students, and create a more inclusive local tech industry.

I urge you to support Senate Bill 980 for the benefit of Baltimore City's students and building an inclusive future for our community.