



TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE ECONOMIC MATTERS COMMITTEE

HB382 Commercial Law – Broadband Access – Low Income Consumer Programs (Maryland Broadband Opportunity and Fairness Act)

Position: Support

By: Linda Kohn, President

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The League of Women Voters of Maryland is a nonpartisan organization that works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and to influence public policy through education and advocacy. The League believes that some of the goals of social policy should be to reduce poverty among Marylanders, thereby securing equal rights and opportunity for all. In an effort to address affordability across the state, HB382 treats broadband access as a utility, an essential part of everyday functioning in today's economy. Lowering the cost of internet access will help eligible low-income households take care of essential needs.

Internet access is required to carry out many essential functions of everyday life. Educational institutions use internet-based programs in many ways, including offering instruction in certain circumstances, requiring students of all ages to have access. Healthcare is often provided online, particularly for patients with mobility issues and for mental health care and support. Many people bank and manage their financial obligations online. Internet access is also important for social interaction and reduced isolation, particularly for the elderly. Many households shop for essential items such as food and medicine online because of reduced mobility or isolation. HB382 requires Internet Service Providers in Maryland to offer low-cost internet services across the state. The legislation sets minimum broadband speed requirements, depending on household size, allows providers to determine plan prices, and establishes an advisory board to define what a low-cost broadband service option should be. It also empowers the State's Attorney General to enforce the definition of affordability.

HB382 adds another tool to Maryland's anti-poverty arsenal, allowing low-income Marylanders to access essential goods and services. The Maryland League of Women Voters, representing over 2,00 Marylanders, urges a favorable report on HB382.