

HB0382 Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Abby Snyder, Co-Chair

Position: FAV



HB382: Maryland Broadband Opportunity and Fairness Act
Economic Matters Committee
SUPPORT
POVERTY FREE MARYLAND

Poverty Free Maryland envisions a Maryland without poverty, and a future where all Marylanders have the support and economic stability that's needed to thrive. **For this reason, Poverty Free Maryland strongly supports House Bill 0382.**

House Bill 0382 would require certain broadband service providers to establish affordable broadband programs for eligible low-income households, ensure those programs meet basic service standards, and require transparent, public-facing advertising so families know these options exist.

National data underscores the urgency. In 2019, individuals living below 100 percent of the federal poverty level were 28 percent less likely to have broadband access than individuals at or above 400 percent of the federal poverty level. This gap has real consequences for economic mobility, education, and health.

For low-income families, broadband access is no longer optional. Students need reliable internet to complete homework and participate fully in school. Workers need broadband to search for jobs, apply for positions, and access remote employment opportunities. Low-income individuals rely on internet access to manage public benefits such as SNAP, Medicaid, energy assistance, and Social Security, all of which increasingly depend on online applications and digital communication. Without affordable broadband, many Marylanders face unnecessary barriers to food security, health care, and housing stability.

House Bill 0382 strengthens Maryland's broadband policy by embedding affordability, transparency, and accountability into law. For these residents, broadband access is a lifeline, supporting education, benefit management, and economic mobility.

Ensuring affordable broadband is a critical step toward reducing poverty and expanding opportunity across Maryland. For these reasons, Poverty Free Maryland respectfully urges the Economic Matters Committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** report on House Bill 0382.

*Founded in 2025 through the merger of Welfare Advocates (established in 1979) and Marylanders Against Poverty (established in 1988), **Poverty Free Maryland** is a coalition of service providers, faith groups, and other organizations working together to exchange information, educate decisionmakers, and advocate for statewide public policies and programs necessary to address the underlying systemic causes of poverty and ensure that low-income Marylanders are provided with low- and no-barrier access to all resources needed to thrive and build a better life for the future.*

Voting Member Agencies:

Anne Arundel County Food Bank

Baltimore Jewish Council

CASH Campaign of Maryland

Catholic Charities

Family League of Baltimore

Laurel Advocacy & Referral Services,
Inc.

Maryland Center on Economic Policy

Maryland Family Network

Maryland Food Bank

Maryland Hunger Solutions

Poverty Free Maryland

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HB 382 FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Amanda Wisniewski

Position: FAV



House Bill 382
Commercial Law – Broadband Access – Low Income Consumer Programs
In the Economic Matters Committee
Hearing on February 12th, 2026
Position: FAVORABLE

Maryland Legal Aid submits its testimony on HB382 at the request of Delegate Fair

Maryland Legal Aid (MLA) is a non-profit law firm that provides free legal services to the State’s low-income and vulnerable residents. Our 12 offices serve residents in each of Maryland’s 24 jurisdictions and handle a range of civil legal matters, including housing, family law, public benefits, bankruptcy and other debt collection matters, and criminal record expungement.

MLA asks for a favorable report on HB382, which ensures that low-income Marylanders can access the internet. The bill establishes a program requiring internet service providers to offer low-cost internet service plans to qualifying customers. Customers are eligible for the program if they qualify for free and reduced-price meal programs or the earned income tax credit, receive Medicaid, low-income energy assistance or SNAP benefits, or if their annual income is below 350% of the federal poverty guidelines.

HB382 would make internet access more affordable for low-income people, like MLA’s clients. In November 2025 the Department of Housing and Community development announced that [99.5% of Maryland is now connected to or has been awarded funding for high-speed, reliable internet](#), but this doesn’t mean that all Marylanders are *actually* connected to the internet. With the rise in rent, groceries, and utility costs, many Marylanders simply cannot afford to pay for internet plans.

The internet is no longer a luxury; it’s a utility. Broadband connection is a lifeline to telehealth services, employment, education, social connection and even advocacy; Marylanders cannot sign up to testify before the legislature without connection to the internet. Affordable broadband connection also increases access to legal service providers like MLA. Online intake applications and electronic communication like e-mail are helpful for those who can’t reach us during traditional business hours. Electronic filing makes it possible for pro se litigants to access the justice system, even if they can’t drive, take time off work, or find the childcare necessary to allow them to visit a physical courthouse.

Maryland Legal Aid urges a favorable report on HB382. If you have any questions please contact Meaghan McDermott, Advocacy Director for Community Lawyering and Development (mmcdermott@mdlabor.org), or Amanda Wisniewski, Community Outreach Manager (acwisniewski@mdlabor.org).

CDN HB 382 FAVORABLE.pdf

Uploaded by: Claudia Wilson Randall

Position: FAV



TESTIMONY
HOUSE BILL 382
House Economic Matters Committee
February 12, 2026
Position: FAVORABLE

Chair Valderrama and Members of the Economic Matters Committee:

The Community Development Network of Maryland (CDN) is the voice for Maryland’s community development sector and serves nearly 200 member organizations. CDN—focuses on small affordable housing developers, housing counseling agencies and community-based non- profits across the state of Maryland. The mission of CDN is to promote, strengthen and advocate for the community development sector throughout Maryland’s urban, suburban and rural communities. CDN envisions a state in which all communities are thriving and where people of all incomes have abundant opportunities for themselves and their families.

CDN is part of a group of advocates in Maryland that helped to pass the [Digital Connectivity Act of 2021](#) (SB 66/HB 970) in 2021, to establish the [Office of Statewide Broadband](#) (OSB) within the Maryland DHCD. It replaced the Office of Rural Broadband, with a goal to ensure all Marylanders have access to affordable, high-speed internet by 2026. Many remain disconnected.

HB 382 – Requires broadband providers to establish programs offering low-cost service options to eligible low-income consumers. Mandates that these low-cost options meet specific performance benchmarks, price thresholds, and prohibits providers from requiring automatic payment plans. The bill also establishes a Broadband Affordability Advisory Board to monitor compliance and report on the effectiveness of these programs.

High-speed Internet service powers education and the economy. It supports access to health care and education, and it connects communities. People without Internet service are forced to go without necessities. Access to government services requires an email address. Rural communities, communities of color, and low-income residents in Maryland see lower rates of access to and adoption of high-speed Internet service.

As illustrated by the Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance interactive [map on our website](#) – developed by expert John B. Horrigan, Ph.d in partnership with the Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance despite progress made in the last five years, the digital divide persists across Maryland, across racial and socioeconomic lines, exacerbated by COVID-19, and disproportionately affecting underinvested, historically Black and Latino communities.

Digital equity is not only a means to empower individuals and communities but also a vital catalyst for achieving broader economic goals. The state of digital equity in Maryland reflects both progress and remaining challenges, particularly regarding broadband access, device availability, digital skills training, and racial disparities. To advance digital equity, this bill seeks to level the playing field by ensuring that low-income residents gain access to the digital resources and opportunities that are integral to today's society.

Digital access is critical for economic growth in Maryland.

We urge your favorable report for HB 382.

Submitted by Claudia Wilson Randall, Executive Director, Community Development Network

HB382_RWDF_LeGrand_Fav.pdf

Uploaded by: Gretchen LeGrand

Position: FAV

Written Testimony (Support)

Bill: HB 382 – Maryland Broadband Opportunity and Fairness Act

Position: Favorable

Submitted by:

Gretchen LeGrand, Senior Program Manager for Digital Equity,

The Robert W. Deutsch Foundation

2519 N Charles St.

Baltimore, MD 21218

gretchen@rwdfoundation.org

The Honorable Delegate Kriselda Valderrama

231 Taylor House Office Building

Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee:

I am submitting this testimony in strong support of House Bill 382, the Maryland Broadband Opportunity and Fairness Act.

At this point, internet access is no longer a luxury; it is a basic utility. Reliable broadband is essential for education, employment, health care, access to public benefits, and civic participation. Yet unlike electricity, water, or even basic phone service, broadband remains largely unregulated at the federal level, allowing a small number of multibillion-dollar corporations to extract high prices from captive markets with little accountability.

HB382 addresses a clear and persistent market failure. In much of Maryland, households have only one realistic option for high-speed internet. Prices are set not by competition, but by monopoly or near-monopoly conditions. As a result, families, particularly low-income households, are forced to choose between internet access and other necessities such as food, medicine, housing, or utilities. This bill does not cap prices broadly or regulate the entire market; instead, it establishes a reasonable affordability floor for households already eligible under widely accepted income criteria.

The bill's approach is pragmatic and balanced. It applies only to providers with a significant market presence, allows exemptions when compliance would cause genuine financial hardship, and permits modest, inflation-linked price increases. Importantly, it also requires transparency; ensuring that low-income plans are clearly advertised and offered on the same terms and conditions as standard plans, rather than hidden behind unnecessary barriers.

HB382 recognizes that broadband *functions* like a utility and should be treated accordingly when the market fails to deliver equitable access. By requiring providers to offer a meaningful low-cost option, Maryland is not overreaching; it is doing what states have historically done when essential infrastructure becomes indispensable to daily life.

Finally, the bill aligns with the State's broader investments in broadband infrastructure and digital equity. Public dollars are being used to expand networks across Maryland. It is both reasonable and responsible to ensure that residents can afford to use the infrastructure they helped pay for.

For these reasons, I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on HB382.
Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'GL', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Gretchen LeGrand

HB382_FAV_EconAction.pdf

Uploaded by: Jennifer Bevan-Dangel

Position: FAV



**HB382 Commercial Law-Broadband Access-Low Income Consumer Programs
(Maryland Broadband Opportunity and Fairness Act)
Position: Favorable**

February 12, 2026

The Honorable Kris Valderrama, Chair
Economic Matters Committee
Room 230, House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
cc: Members, House Economic Matters

Chair Valderrama and Members of the Committee:

Economic Action Maryland Fund is here in strong support of HB382.

As public and private products and services increasingly move online, access to broadband and other digital tools is a necessity rather than a luxury. Increasingly banking, credit cards, tax credits, utilities, public assistance, medical appointments and prescriptions, and bill payment have moved online and reduced the number of workers who used to answer calls from individuals.

Access to fast, reliable, and affordable broadband service is critical to engage in public life, pay bills, access credit and much more. Yet, for too many Marylanders, broadband service is out of reach, limiting their ability to easily access services and products. A 2021 report found that 23% of Maryland households do not have broadband services, with Black and Brown households being disproportionately left behind¹. Lack of broadband services is an issue for both urban centers and rural Maryland.

The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) which provided support for eligible households for internet services ended in 2024. Although some internet providers offer program discounts, these discounts do not do enough to make these services affordable to households struggling to make ends meet.

With changes to SNAP and Medicare at the national level, the need for accessible, reliable broadband is more important than ever. New federal requirements will mandate that more than 80,000 SNAP recipients and 320,000 Medicare recipients in Maryland verify their work eligibility by uploading documents to a portal twice a year. Economic Action Maryland fund conducted a study in late 2025 of more than 500 Marylanders statewide on affordability and access issues.

Twenty-five (25%) of participants noted that broadband access would be a barrier to their ability to meet the eligibility requirements. In other words, affordable, accessible broadband will prevent tens of thousands of Marylanders from losing critical financial assistance.

¹ <https://abell.org/publication/disconnected-in-maryland/>

Economic Action (formerly the Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition) champions economic rights and housing justice through advocacy, research, consumer education, and direct service. Our 12,500 supporters include consumer advocates, practitioners, and low-income and working families throughout Maryland.



This program is also an investment in our children's future. Many families do not have reliable broadband service which is a barrier to children in the household completing homework reliably or using tools such as search engines to assist them in their studies. Education is a critical factor in economic mobility and lack of broadband should not be an impediment to our children's education. It should be seen as a critical investment.

For all these reasons, we support HB 382 and urge a favorable report.

Best,

Marceline White
Executive Director

Economic Action (formerly the Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition) champions economic rights and housing justice through advocacy, research, consumer education, and direct service. Our 12,500 supporters include consumer advocates, practitioners, and low-income and working families throughout Maryland.

2209 Maryland Ave · Baltimore, MD 21218 | www.econaction.org
Marceline White · Marceline@EconAction.org | Jennifer Bevan-Dangel · Jennifer@EconAction.org

HB382 MALMB Testimony.docx.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Kovacs

Position: FAV



**Local power, collective voice
for Maryland's children, youth and families**

February 12, 2025

**SUPPORT – HB0382 - Commercial Law - Broadband Access - Low-Income Consumer Programs
(Maryland Broadband Opportunity and Fairness Act)**

Dear Delegates:

On behalf of the Maryland Association of Local Management Boards, I am writing in support of **HB0382 - Commercial Law - Broadband Access - Low-Income Consumer Programs (Maryland Broadband Opportunity and Fairness Act)** to require certain broadband providers in the State to establish a program to provide certain broadband services to eligible low-income consumers. Internet access is an essential utility. Expanding access means students have access to their homework and other educational resources. Families can seek employment, apply for benefits and take advantage of numerous services. Internet access should now be considered an essential basic need.

Local Management Boards in each county and jurisdiction in the State of Maryland work in low income neighborhoods to address the needs of children and families in their respective jurisdiction. We regularly work with families who are struggling to pay bills, managing rising rents and skyrocketing BGE bills, as well as the increasing price of groceries. Any sort of relief will help our families gain stability. Internet access is vital yet many low income families have to make the choice between that and food or housing costs.

We urge you to support HB0382 - Commercial Law - Broadband Access - Low-Income Consumer Programs (Maryland Broadband Opportunity and Fairness Act) to create more broadband access to low-income families in Maryland.

Sincerely,

Pamela M. Brown, PhD
Chair

HB0382 Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Madelin Martinez

Position: FAV

HB0382
Maryland Broadband Opportunity and Fairness Act 2026
Economic Matters
February 12, 2026
Favorable

Catholic Charities of Baltimore supports House Bill 0382, which would require certain broadband service providers in Maryland to establish affordable broadband programs for eligible low-income consumers, ensure that these programs meet defined service standards, and require transparent public advertising of program availability.

For over a century, [Catholic Charities](#) has provided care and services to improve the lives of Marylanders in need. We accompany Marylanders as they age with dignity, pursue employment and career advancement, heal from trauma and addiction, achieve independence, prepare for educational success, and we welcome immigrant neighbors into Maryland communities.

Caring for seniors is one of Catholic Charities core areas of focus. We operate 24 senior housing communities across Baltimore City and four counties, comprising nearly 1,800 affordable housing units. Our residents include seniors living on fixed incomes, individuals with disabilities, and older adults managing chronic health conditions. As the largest private provider of human services in Maryland, we see firsthand that broadband access is not a luxury, it is a lifeline.

Numerous government and private sector studies demonstrate a substantial disparity in broadband access between lower- and higher-income households. Individuals living below 100 percent of the federal poverty level were 28 percent less likely to have access to broadband than those living at or above 400 percent of the federal poverty level (57% compared to 85 %). These disparities are even more pronounced among older adults. In 2019, low-income adults age 65 and older were significantly less likely to have internet and broadband access than adults ages 18 to 64¹. These gaps place low-income seniors at a significant disadvantage in accessing essential services that increasingly depend on reliable broadband connectivity.

Research consistently shows that affordable broadband access is critical for older adults, as it is essential to meeting basic daily needs and maintaining independence². Reliable internet access enables seniors to participate in telemedicine visits, manage prescriptions, communicate with health care providers, and access remote care, which is particularly important for individuals with mobility limitations or chronic health conditions.. Reliable internet access enables seniors to participate in telemedicine visits, manage

¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, *Internet Access Among Low-Income Households: 2019 Data Report* (2019), <https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/bbf81439f9587383bf1711196ee3b308/internet-access-among-low-income-2019.pdf>

prescriptions, communicate with health care providers, and access remote care, which is particularly important for individuals with mobility limitations or chronic health conditions.

Broadband access is also necessary for applying for and managing public benefits, including SNAP, Medicaid, energy assistance, and Social Security, as these programs increasingly rely on online applications, digital verification, and electronic communication. Without affordable internet access, seniors face significant barriers to maintaining benefits that are vital to food security, health coverage, and housing stability.

Additionally, Broadband access supports employment and training opportunities for older adults who wish to or need to remain in the workforce, and helps reduce social isolation and loneliness, which are well-documented risk factors for poor physical and mental health among seniors².

For these reasons, Catholic Charities of Baltimore respectfully urges the Economic Matters Committee to issue a FAVORABLE report on House Bill 0382.

Submitted By: Madelin Martinez, Assistant Director of Advocacy on behalf of Meti T. Negassa,
Catholic Charities Advocacy Fellow

² HunterFiber. *How Seniors Benefit from Reliable Internet Access*.
<https://hunterfiber.com/seniors-benefit-from-reliable-internet/>

LWV testimony HB 382.pdf

Uploaded by: Nancy Lynott

Position: FAV



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

Date: February 12, 2026

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.

HB0382-ECM-FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Nina Themelis

Position: FAV



BRANDON M. SCOTT
MAYOR

*Office of Government Relations
88 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401*

HB 382

February 12, 2026

TO: Members of the Economic Matters Committee

FROM: Nina Themelis, Director of the Mayor's Office of Government Relations

RE: House Bill 382 – Commercial Law – Broadband Access – Low–Income Consumer Programs (Maryland Broadband Opportunity and Fairness Act)

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Valderrama, Vice Chair Charkoudian, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** House Bill (HB) 382.

This legislation will increase access to affordable home internet for Baltimore City residents and represents an important opportunity to close the digital divide. The legislation requires Maryland broadband providers with 10,000 or more customers to offer low-income internet plans that meet the FCC’s minimum broadband standards of 100/20 Mbps with low latency, with exemptions for smaller providers or those facing unsustainable financial impact. It establishes eligibility for the low-income plan for individuals or households meeting criteria for various federal and state assistance programs or having an income at or below 350% of the federal poverty guidelines. It requires 30 days’ notice for any increase and establishes a Broadband Affordability Advisory Board to define “low-cost broadband,” while leaving rate setting to providers. Additionally, the bill protects consumers by prohibiting mandatory automatic payments, requiring low-income plans to be available as standalone or bundled options, and mandating clear advertising of these programs so eligible residents can easily find and enroll in them.

Impact on Baltimore City Residents

Despite improvements over the last four years, the digital divide continues to limit opportunities for Baltimore City residents. The percentage of Baltimore residents with internet subscriptions (83.1%) lags the rest of the state of Maryland (92.5%).¹ This discrepancy is even higher for wireline internet services such as fiber or cable internet, which are linked to improved household outcomes in education and adult learning as well as increased access to employment opportunities compared to wireless connections.²

¹ Census Bureau. (2025). *s2801-Census Bureau Tables*. Retrieved from Census Bureau: <https://data.census.gov/table?q=s2801&g=050XX00US24510>

² Horrigan, John B. (2020). Baltimore’s Digital Divide: Gaps in Internet Connectivity and the Impact on Low-Income City Resident. Retrieved from: https://abell.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/2020_Abell_digital20divide_full20report_FINAL_web20dr.pdf

Baltimore residents have identified cost as the most significant barrier to broadband access, with many residents expressing fear of unanticipated price increases.³ Consequently, low-income residents are the least likely to have internet subscriptions. As of 2024, 19% of Baltimore City households earning less than \$20,000 annually reported no internet subscription. The same is true for 10.5% of households making between \$20,000-\$74,999 annually.⁴ Previous subsidies through the federal Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), launched in 2021, reduced internet costs for lower-income households. However, this program was discontinued in 2024, leaving many households to make difficult decisions about reducing costs, picking up extra work, or abandoning internet subscriptions altogether.⁵

HB 382 will alleviate price-related limitations to broadband access for the majority of Baltimore residents. The bill provides that households earning less than 350% of the federal poverty level are eligible for the low-income plan. It is estimated that 54% of Baltimore households meet this criterion.⁶ This legislation would bolster Baltimore City's existing commitments and efforts to close the digital divide and combat digital redlining.

The BCA respectfully requests a **support** report on HB 382.

³ Baltimore City. (2023). Baltimore City's Digital Inclusion Strategy: 2024-2029. Retrieved from: https://s3.amazonaws.com/baltimorecity.gov.if-us-east-1/s3fs-public/2024-04/baltimore_city_digital_inclusion_strategy.pdf

⁴ Census Bureau. (2025). *s2801-Census Bureau Tables*. Retrieved from Census Bureau: <https://data.census.gov/table?q=s2801&g=050XX00US24510>

⁵ Horrigan, John B. (2025). *Budgeting for Broadband: What Losing the ACP Means to Household Budgets and Behavior*. Retrieved from the Benton Institute: https://www.benton.org/sites/default/files/Budgeting4Broadband_0.pdf

⁶ United for ALICE (2025). *The State of ALICE in Maryland: 2025 Update on Financial Hardship Report*. Retrieved from United for Alice: <https://www.unitedforalice.org/Attachments/AllReports/state-of-alice-report-maryland-2025.pdf>

HB 382 - MoCo - TEBS_Morningstar_FAV (GA 26).pdf

Uploaded by: Sara Morningstar

Position: FAV



Montgomery County

Office of Intergovernmental Relations

ROCKVILLE: 240-777-6550

ANNAPOLIS: 240-777-8270

HB 382

DATE: February 12, 2026

SPONSOR: Delegate Fair, et al.

ASSIGNED TO: Economic Matters

CONTACT PERSON: Sara Morningstar (Sara.Morningstar@montgomerycountymd.gov)

POSITION: Support (Montgomery County Department of Technology and Enterprise Business Solutions)

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

House Bill 382 requires broadband providers in Maryland to provide low-cost broadband services to eligible low-income consumers on or before December 1, 2026. The low-cost plans must meet the minimum speed for broadband as established by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), and households earning up to 350% of the federal poverty rate would be eligible to purchase them. The bill authorizes the Office of Statewide Broadband in the Department of Housing and Community Development to exempt providers from the requirement based on certain exceptions and establishes a Broadband Affordability Advisory Board to define “low-cost broadband service.”

Montgomery County Department of Technology and Enterprise Business Solutions (TEBS) supports this legislation because: (1) most providers can meet the requirements; (2) low-income families need broadband plans that meet the federal minimum broadband speeds; and (3) low-cost broadband is good for the Maryland economy.

When the federal government and Maryland partnered to offer an internet subsidy (the Affordable Connectivity Plan, ACP), 12% of Maryland low-income households enrolled (287,000 households). Thirty percent of Maryland households subscribing to broadband are low-income. Almost a quarter of low-income broadband subscribers are using a plan that does not meet the federal minimum broadband speed. And according to the United Way ALICE data, the basic survival budget for many Maryland households is 300 to 350% of the federal poverty rate.

Access to low-cost broadband increases household income and employment. All Maryland households, regardless of income, should have access to affordable broadband plans that meet minimal federal speed requirements. Broadband is a modern and essential service, critical for accessing employment opportunities, education, healthcare (telehealth), and government services, as well as for fostering important social inclusion in our communities. Montgomery County TEBS supports HB 382 and urges that the Committee adopt a favorable report.

ACP Enrollment & Basic Needs as % of Federal Poverty Rate Data by County

Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP): Maryland households enrolled in a benefit program or earning less than 200% of federal poverty rate to receive up to \$30 per month subsidy for internet service. The United Way calculates the budget needs for ALICE households (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed). The chart below shows the ALICE survival household budget as a percentage of the federal poverty rate.

TOTAL Maryland ACP ENROLLMENT Through January 31, 2024		2025 United Way ALICE Data % of Federal Poverty Rate to meet basic needs (2023)	
County Name	Total Subscribers	Two Seniors	Family of 4
NOT AVAILABLE	862		
Allegany County	4,809	257%	245%
Anne Arundel County	16,390	348%	361%
Baltimore City	83,772	321%	320%
Baltimore County	44,537	318%	323%
Calvert County	2,291	361%	350%
Caroline County	1,610	270%	259%
Carroll County	3,584	313%	321%
Cecil County	4,794	308%	296%
Charles County	5,536	363%	354%
Dorchester County	2,699	266%	252%
Frederick County	6,495	349%	347%
Garrett County	1,396	246%	233%
Harford County	8,468	318%	326%
Howard County	6,646	354%	386%
Kent County	817	290%	284%
Montgomery County	25,252	368%	378%
Prince George's County	39,386	347%	325%
Queen Anne's County	1,037	321%	324%
St. Mary's County	4,156	316%	317%
Somerset County	2,451	254%	246%
Talbot County	1,066	303%	282%
Washington County	9,096	263%	264%
Wicomico County	8,325	270%	265%
Worcester County	2,247	271%	265%
TOTAL MD ACP Enrollment	287,722	308%	305%

HB0382_UNF_MTC_Comm. Law - Broadband Access - Low-

Uploaded by: Drew Vetter

Position: UNF



House Economic Matters Committee

February 12, 2026

House Bill 382 – *Commercial Law – Broadband Access – Low-Income Consumer Programs (Maryland Broadband Opportunity and Fairness Act)*

POSITION: OPPOSE

The Maryland Tech Council (MTC), with over 800 members, is the State's largest association of technology companies. Our vision is to propel Maryland to be the country's number one innovation economy for life sciences and technology. MTC brings the State's life sciences and technology communities into a single, united organization that empowers members to achieve their goals through advocacy, networking, and education. On behalf of MTC, we submit this letter of **opposition** to House Bill 382.

This bill would require broadband providers serving 10,000 or more customers to create and administer low-income broadband service programs by December 1, 2026, with mandated minimum service standards, advertising requirements, and annual reporting obligations, and would also classify violations as unfair or deceptive trade practices. MTC strongly supports the goal of expanding affordable broadband access, yet the structure and obligations embedded in House Bill 382 risk creating barriers rather than facilitating progress.

The bill's prescriptive service-level requirements, including mandated minimum speeds, latency standards, and limitations on price adjustments, are inflexible in a sector where technology evolves rapidly, and network demands expand unpredictably. These conditions may quickly become outdated, compromising providers' ability to respond to emerging needs and invest in network improvements across Maryland. Additionally, the bill's significant regulatory and administrative responsibilities, including detailed annual compliance reports and mandated advertising of low-income programs, could disproportionately burden mid-sized and regional providers. These providers are key to expanding last-mile connectivity, and diverting resources toward compliance processes risks slowing deployment in the very communities the bill seeks to help.

The exemption process described in the legislation does little to reduce this uncertainty. Although the Office of Statewide Broadband may exempt providers who face undue financial hardship and serve fewer than 20,000 households, the criteria are not clearly defined, requiring providers to invest substantial time and resources in compliance planning even before they know whether an exemption is possible. Moreover, classifying noncompliance as an unfair, abusive, or deceptive trade practice heightens legal and financial risks for what may be administrative errors rather than intentional misconduct. This classification introduces exposure not typically associated with broadband affordability programs and could further deter investment and innovation.

For these reasons, the MTC respectfully urges the General Assembly to reconsider House Bill 382. We believe a collaborative approach that emphasizes flexibility, harmonizes with existing federal and state initiatives, and supports continued private-sector investment will better advance our shared commitment to expanding affordable, high-quality broadband access across Maryland. We stand ready to work with legislators and State agencies to craft solutions that achieve these goals without imposing unintended barriers to progress.

For more information call:

Andrew G. Vetter

J. Steven Wise

Danna L. Kauffman

Christine K. Krone

410-244-7000

MDCC_HB 382_Unfavorable.pdf

Uploaded by: Grason Wiggins

Position: UNF



House Bill 382

Position: Unfavorable

Committee: Economic Matters

Date: February 12, 2026

Founded in 1968, the Maryland Chamber of Commerce (“Maryland Chamber”) is a statewide coalition of more than 7,000 members working to develop and promote strong public policy that ensures sustained economic growth and opportunity for all Marylanders.

House Bill 382 (HB 382) would require each broadband provider serving 10,000 or more customers to establish a low-income consumer program that would be subject to artificial price controls and burdensome regulations. As a result, Maryland HB 382 would make it more difficult for broadband companies to accurately forecast revenues and justify new or expanded investment in Maryland.

Maryland is a national leader in broadband coverage and performance, consistently ranking among the top states for high-speed internet accessibility and overall broadband infrastructure, speed, and access. Additionally, prices for broadband services have sharply declined even as the prices for other consumer goods and services have risen, coupled with faster speeds and improved consumer value.

HB 382 would introduce artificial price controls into the broadband market that will have unintended negative consequences. Studies show that price floor, rate-setting types of policies often hurt the consumers they are intending to help. Examples include gasoline price mandates in Hawaii resulting in higher costs for consumers; rent-control markets across the country seeing reduced investment and a lack of housing options; and price caps on interchange fees leading to higher costs and fewer low-income consumer benefits.

HB 382 would jeopardize Maryland’s BEAD funding. In November 2025, NTIA Administrator Arielle Roth publicly affirmed that the agency would withhold BEAD funds from states that attempt to impose price regulations on BEAD providers. A California bill similar to HB 382 was pulled by its sponsor over fears that it would jeopardize the state’s BEAD allocation. Additionally, Virginia decided not to pursue legislation similar to HB 382 due to concerns over the potential loss of BEAD funding.

HB 382 could potentially violate federal law by regulating wireless pricing and would create administrative burdens and privacy concerns regarding eligibility. These flaws could embroil Maryland in costly litigation and provide regulatory uncertainty that discourages investment.

In sum, forcing broadband providers to offer their services at a price that is artificially low and likely below the actual cost of providing and maintaining the service is not sustainable. Providers cannot simply absorb this loss without changing other aspects of their businesses, to the detriment of consumers generally. **For these reasons, the Maryland Chamber of Commerce respectfully opposes HB 382.**



2-12-26 CTIA Maryland HB 382 Opposition Testimony.

Uploaded by: Jeremy Crandall

Position: UNF



**Testimony of
JEREMY CRANDALL
CTIA**

**In Opposition to
House Bill 382**

**Before the
House Economic Matters Committee**

February 12, 2026

Chair Valderrama, Vice Chair Charkoudian and Members of the Committee –

On behalf of CTIA®, the trade association for the wireless communications industry, I am testifying in opposition to House Bill 382. For the past 20 years, intense competition and record-setting industry investment in networks has resulted in what is an affordability success story for consumers accessing wireless services, leading to substantial benefits for hundreds of millions of Americans nationwide, including low-income consumers. This includes:

- *Lower Prices:* Even as inflation raised prices for most consumer goods and services, the price of wireless service declined by 0.5% over the past four years, while smartphone prices fell by more than 50%. The price per megabyte dropped 62% from 2020 to 2024.
- *More Choice:* 5G wireless home broadband is the fastest growing broadband connection in the nation. In 2024, 5G fixed wireless access added nearly 4 million new subscribers, representing 99% of new fixed broadband subscriptions.
- *Record Demand:* Consumers used a record 132 trillion megabytes of mobile data last year, fueled by a historic 32 trillion MB year-over-year increase, the single largest jump in U.S. wireless history. This marks the third straight year of roughly 35% annual growth.
- *Substantial Investment:* Last year, wireless providers invested \$29 billion in private funding to improve connectivity for consumers, and nearly \$219 billion since 2018.¹

¹ <https://www.ctia.org/news/2024-annual-survey-highlights>



Due in large part to these benefits, Maryland consumers can currently choose competitively priced home broadband plans. With this intense competition, providers need to offer competitive pricing to consumers, including low-income consumers.

Evidence Demonstrates Mandates Raise Prices and Lowers Competition

The evidence is clear that fierce competition from wireless carriers drives down broadband prices and fosters investment and innovation. There is also widespread evidence that artificial price mandates and state-level rate regulation, while well-intended, ultimately increase prices and harm consumers.

- A recent analysis by Compass Lexecon found that price floor, rate-setting policies often hurt the consumers they are intending to help. Examples include gasoline price mandates in Hawaii resulting in higher costs for consumers; rent-control markets across the country seeing reduced investment; and price caps on interchange fees leading to higher costs and fewer low-income consumer benefits.²
- A recent report conducted by the Advanced Analytical Consulting Group and Northeastern University found that the competitive nature of the wireless industry has served consumers much better than utilities like water and electricity service subject to rate-regulation. In Maryland between 2012 and 2022, electricity rates increased 13% and water rates increased 88% while wireless rates decreased 44%.³
- Price mandates drive competitors from the market and deprive consumers of real choice in home broadband service. In 2025, one provider pointed to New York’s broadband “affordability” mandate as the reason for ending its home broadband offering in that state.⁴

Price Mandates Invalidate BEAD Funding

In addition to the negative policy impacts of a pricing mandate, such an approach puts Maryland’s federal Broadband, Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) funding at serious risk. Beginning in June 2025 and as recently as last week, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) has now issued multiple updated FAQs and Policy Notices related to the BEAD Program that expressly prohibit states from setting the price for BEAD

² Compass Lexecon, Adverse Effects of Price Regulation, January 2025.

³ Advanced Analytical Consulting Group and Northeastern University, State Price Regulation of Wireless Services, January 2025.

⁴ <https://www.pcmag.com/news/att-kills-5g-home-internet-service-in-ny-over-15-broadband-law>



subgrantees' low-cost service options (LCSOs). Examples of this emphasis include the following:

- *“BEAD subgrantees must still comply with the statutory provision to offer at least one LCSO, but NTIA hereby prohibits Eligible Entities from explicitly or implicitly setting the LCSO rate a subgrantee must offer. To be clear, NTIA will only approve Final Proposals that include LCSOs proposed by the subgrantees themselves.”*⁵
- *“... [a state must] commit that it will not enforce any law, regulation, or other enforceable obligation that regulates the rates, terms, and conditions of broadband internet service or imposes net neutrality rules, open access, or other utility-style rules on broadband internet service, against a Subgrantee or its affiliates anywhere it provides service within the State, while that Subgrantee has any subgrant that is still within its period of performance, extended period of performance, or federal interest period.”*⁶

Furthermore, NTIA emphasizes this condition 1) applies to all existing *and future* state laws for the duration of the program and 2) applies to *any* service offered by a BEAD subgrantee.

CTIA's member companies throughout the wireless industry are proud of their ongoing work to expand connectivity to more communities and provide affordable connectivity options for Maryland consumers at a time when bridging the digital divide is paramount. Policy approaches that embrace competition and innovation – and reject price mandates and rate-regulation – are proven to work. For these reasons, we strongly oppose House Bill 382.

⁵ <https://www.ntia.gov/sites/default/files/2025-06/bead-restructuring-policy-notice.pdf>

⁶ https://broadbandusa.ntia.gov/sites/default/files/2025-11/BEAD_FAQs_V16.pdf

PDF_[MD] HB 382_Broadband_TechNEt.pdf

Uploaded by: margaret durkin

Position: UNF

February 10, 2026

The Honorable Kris Valderrama
Chair
House Economic Matters Committee
Maryland House of Delegates
231 Taylor House Office Building
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: HB 382 (Fair) - Commercial Law - Broadband Access - Low-Income Consumer Programs (Maryland Broadband Opportunity and Fairness Act) – Unfavorable

Dear Chair Valderrama and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of TechNet, I'm writing to share concerns on HB 382.

TechNet is the national, bipartisan network of technology CEOs and senior executives that promotes the growth of the innovation economy by advocating a targeted policy agenda at the federal and 50-state level. TechNet's diverse membership includes 104 dynamic American businesses ranging from startups to the most iconic companies on the planet and represents five million employees and countless customers in the fields of information technology, artificial intelligence, e-commerce, the sharing and gig economies, advanced energy, transportation, cybersecurity, venture capital, and finance.

TechNet is concerned that HB 382 will jeopardize Maryland's access to \$79.1 million in federal Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) funding. In our view, this bill directly conflicts with the National Telecommunications and Information Administration's (NTIA) BEAD Restructuring Policy Notice (RPN) low-cost service option (LSCO) rules, including with respect to pricing, speeds, and eligibility criteria. If enacted, the bill also would constitute the kind of state broadband regulation that violates NTIA's BEAD General Terms and Conditions (GTCs).

The eligibility criteria for the proposed low-income consumer program goes beyond those that apply to the FCC's Lifeline program. Thus, the Section 14-5105(D)(1) requirement that the Broadband Affordability Advisory Board adopt a BEAD LCSO definition that "[m]eet[s] the requirements of this subtitle" conflicts with the BEAD RPN's Lifeline-based "Eligible Subscriber" definition for the LCSO.

Various provisions of the bill violate BEAD RPN LCSO requirements and go beyond some of the affordable home internet offerings our members provide to qualifying households. These offerings include lower-priced internet plans, low-cost

computers, free Wifi hotspots, and free internet training. Moreover, on page 5, starting at line 12, the language is overly broad. Under 14-5102, sections (G) and (H) are generally problematic and don't fit in the context of this consumer-facing bill. These requirements would dictate how a private provider manages their network. Finally, in Section 14-5105 (A)(2), NTIA has already approved Maryland's plan and defined "Low-Cost Service Option".

For the reasons stated above, TechNet is opposed to HB 382 and urges an unfavorable report due to the risks it would pose to federal BEAD funding. Thank you for your consideration of our concerns. Please don't hesitate to reach out with any questions.

Sincerely,

Margaret Durkin

Margaret Durkin
TechNet Executive Director, Pennsylvania & the Mid-Atlantic

CCIA Comments on MD HB 382.pdf

Uploaded by: Megan Stokes

Position: UNF



February 12, 2026

House Economic Matters Committee
Attn: Joy Jones
230 Taylor House Office Building

Re: HB 382 - "Maryland Broadband Opportunity and Fairness Act" (Oppose)

Dear Chair Valderrama and Members of the House Economic Matters Committee:

On behalf of the Computer & Communications Industry Association (CCIA), I write to respectfully oppose unless amended HB 382, in advance of the House Economic Matters Committee hearing on February 12, 2026.

CCIA is an international, not-for-profit trade association representing a broad cross-section of communications and technology firms.¹ Proposed regulations on the interstate provision of digital services therefore can have a significant impact on CCIA members. CCIA represents leading technology and communications companies that invest billions of dollars annually to expand broadband access, improve network performance, and deliver innovative services to consumers across the United States.

CCIA and its members strongly support efforts to expand affordable broadband access, particularly for low-income households. These comments are focused on the bill's inapt application to satellite-based broadband services, which are regulated at the federal level and often do not include the same features and functions of wireline-based broadband services.

1. HB 382 is an inappropriate attempt by Maryland **to set retail prices in a vibrantly competitive market**. It would manipulate broadband markets through artificial pricing structures, intrusive operational mandates, and legally questionable requirements. Rather than expanding access, the bill risks discouraging deployment, slowing innovation, and increasing compliance costs that ultimately harm consumers.

2. The bill includes a **requirement** that low-cost broadband offerings "include ... at least 1.2 terabytes of data storage." Data storage is typically a component of wireline broadband service. The bill would impose an obligation on satellite services that they might not provide. Moreover, apart from the incongruity of forcing satellite services to add a feature they do not provide, this provision raises additional legal concerns. This provision appears intended to extend to email hosting and/or cloud-based storage, which are products distinct from the broadband services that carry them. Here HB382 runs into serious jurisdictional problems: the state has authority to regulate the terms and conditions under which telecommunications service is provided, but not the information services that are carried via telecommunications.

3. Similar to the provision just discussed, HB 382 includes a requirement that satellite-based broadband must allow customers to buy "broadband service **bundled with cable television** or

¹ For more than 50 years, CCIA has promoted open markets, open systems, and open networks. CCIA members employ more than 1.6 million workers, invest more than \$100 billion in research and development, and contribute trillions of dollars in productivity to the global economy. A list of CCIA members is available at <https://www.ccianet.org/members>.



phone service.” This bundling mandate is another bad fit: not all providers of satellite-based broadband want to provide video programming. Though wireline-based service is often bundled, assuming that satellite-based service involves bundling is a mistake. This provision would interfere with providers’ product design, pricing, and marketing decisions, and represents an unnecessary intrusion into the competitive broadband marketplace.

4. The **bill’s definitions are internally inconsistent** and create significant uncertainty for covered providers. “Broadband service” is defined expansively to include nearly all modern broadband offerings, while the definition of “provider” is circular and conflicting. The bill initially applies to providers serving more than 10,000 customers, yet later exempts providers serving fewer than 20,000 customers from the low-income mandate. These inconsistencies make compliance difficult and invite arbitrary enforcement.

5. Beginning December 1, 2026, HB 382 would require ISPs serving more than 20,000 customers to offer a low-cost broadband option to low-income consumers at mandated speeds tied to household size—100 Mbps/20 Mbps for households of two or fewer, and 200 Mbps/20 Mbps for households of three or more. The bill provides **no clear mechanism for verifying household size**, leaving providers without workable guidance and exposing them to compliance risk. Additionally, unlike similar statutes in other states, HB 382 does not specify a rate, effectively creating artificial pricing through regulatory uncertainty.

* * * * *

For these reasons, CCIA respectfully urges the Committee to oppose HB 382. We remain committed to working with policymakers on solutions that expand broadband access while preserving competition, innovation, and lawful regulatory boundaries.

Sincerely,

Megan Stokes

State Policy Director

Computer & Communications Industry Association

HB382 Oppose Letter USTelecom.pdf

Uploaded by: Paul Plymouth

Position: UNF

February 10, 2026

The Honorable Kriselda Valderrama
Chair
Economic Matters Committee
Maryland House of Delegates
231 Taylor House Office Building
6 Bladen St.
Annapolis, MD 21401

Subject: HB 382 – Oppose

Chair Valderrama and Members of the Committee:

USTelecom – The Broadband Association (“USTelecom”)¹ and its members, America’s innovative broadband providers, are committed to delivering resilient and reliable broadband internet service to their hundreds of thousands of Maryland consumers. The broadband industry has invested more than \$2.2 trillion² in network infrastructure throughout the country since 1996—with approximately \$89.6 billion invested in 2024 alone—and USTelecom members are among the country’s top investors.

We respectfully oppose HB 382, which would impose government-mandated rate regulation on broadband providers, distort Maryland’s broadband market, and ultimately undermine private-sector investment in digital infrastructure. HB 382 sets unrealistic speed mandates, establishes eligibility criteria so broad that it would encompass most of the state’s population, and threatens to upend Maryland’s broadband ecosystem by forcing providers into unsustainable business models.

Broadband providers operate in an intensely competitive marketplace, where pricing remains consistent across states and is shaped by market dynamics rather than arbitrary government mandates. Regulatory intervention in pricing fails to account for the substantial and ongoing costs of maintaining a 24/7 network capable of delivering world-class connectivity to Maryland residents and businesses. Infrastructure deployment, network maintenance, and technology upgrades require sustained investment—investment that is jeopardized when artificial price controls undermine the financial sustainability of broadband networks.

HB 382 is De Facto Rate Regulation That Will Harm Investment & Innovation

HB 382’s attempt to mandate an “affordable broadband plan” is a government-mandated price control in disguise. By requiring providers to offer service at state-defined rates, regardless of the cost of infrastructure, network maintenance, or market conditions, the bill:

¹ USTelecom is the premier trade association representing service providers and suppliers for the communications industry. USTelecom members provide a full array of services, including broadband, voice, data, and video over wireline and wireless networks. Its diverse membership ranges from international publicly traded corporations to local and regional companies and cooperatives, serving consumers and businesses in every corner of the country.

² USTelecom, 2024 Broadband Capex Report, October 21, 2025; available at: www.ustelecom.org/research/2024-broadband-capex-report

- **Disincentivizes private investment** – Broadband providers have invested billions in Maryland’s networks, yet price controls deter further deployment, especially in rural and high-cost areas.
- **Does Not Reflect Market Trends** – Because of robust competition in the marketplace, real prices for the most popular broadband plans—those delivering between 100 and 940 megabits per second—fell 8.7 percent in just one year. Even gigabit broadband prices declined 6.2 percent in real terms. Since 2015 broadband prices have fallen 43 percent while overall consumer prices have risen 35.8 percent.³
- **Ignores Existing Affordability Programs** - The federal Broadband Equity Access and Deployment Program, (BEAD) already requires recipients to offer one low-income broadband plan and the federal Lifeline program provides eligible customers a \$9.25 broadband discount. Additionally, ISPs offer their own voluntary low-income programs, such as Verizon Forward, Comcast’s Internet Essentials, Access from AT&T, Spectrum Internet Assist, Cox’s Connect Assist and Connect2Compete, Optimum Advantage, Astound Internet First, Breezeline Internet Assist, and Mediacom Xstream Connect.⁴

Building broadband networks (particularly fiber) is incredibly expensive, especially in rural and mountainous areas. Price caps like the one adopted in New York artificially lowers the potential return on investment, making it harder for providers to justify the massive, high-risk capital needed for these builds. The threat of government rate regulation also creates significant uncertainty, discouraging new competitors from entering the state and chilling private investment.

This mandate would jeopardize Maryland’s BEAD funding. In November 2025, NTIA Administrator Arielle Roth publicly affirmed that the agency would withhold BEAD funds from states that attempt to impose price regulations on BEAD providers.⁵ Indeed last year a similar California low-income discount bill was pulled by its sponsor over fears that it would jeopardize the state’s BEAD allocation. Virginia also decided not to pursue this type of legislation over concerns with BEAD funding. Furthermore, the BEAD program is designed to do exactly what Maryland is seeking to achieve – provide all Marylanders with access to reliable and affordable broadband, however, risking that much needed funding by placing new mandates on broadband providers is contrary to that effort.

HB 382 is an Unprecedented Overreach That Will Undermine Maryland’s Broadband Market

While ensuring broadband affordability is an important policy goal, HB 382 takes an extreme and counterproductive approach that will deter private investment, destabilize pricing, and set dangerous regulatory precedents. Instead of heavy-handed price controls policymakers should work with broadband providers on sustainable, targeted affordability initiatives.

If Maryland is to remain at the forefront of innovation and economic growth, policymakers must encourage broadband expansion, not inhibit it through restrictive rate-setting policies. We urge you to work with industry to modify your proposal as currently drafted by focusing on solutions that foster

³ USTelecom, 2025 Broadband Pricing Index (November 19, 2025); available at <https://ustelecom.org/research/2025-bpi/>

⁴ CNET, Low Income Guide For All 50 States (July 19, 2025); available at <https://www.cnet.com/home/internet/low-income-internet-guide-for-all-50-states/>

⁵ See *Frequently Asked Questions and Answers Broadband Equity Access and Deployment Program*, NTIA (V16) https://broadbandusa.ntia.gov/sites/default/files/2025-11/BEAD_FAQs_V16.pdf

continued investment and ensure long-term connectivity for all Marylanders.

For these reasons, **we strongly oppose HB 382** and look forward to working with you on market-driven solutions to expand affordable broadband access across Maryland. We look forward to continuing to work with your office and committee staff on a feasible solution that achieve the goals stated in the legislation.

Respectfully,

/s/ B. Lynn Follansbee

B. Lynn Follansbee
Vice President, Strategic Initiatives & Partnerships

HB382 Opposition - Verizon Written Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Paul Plymouth

Position: UNF



12 West Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Bill No: HB 382

Title: Commercial Law - Broadband Access - Low-Income Consumer Programs (Maryland Broadband Opportunity and Fairness Act)

Committee: House Economic Matters Committee

Hearing Date: February 12, 2026

Verizon Position: **OPPOSE**

Greetings Chair Valderrama and members of the Economic Matters Committee.

Verizon appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 382, the Maryland Broadband Opportunity and Fairness Act. We share the belief that every consumer should have access to affordable, high-performing broadband service. The low-income broadband mandate embodied in this proposed legislation is the wrong approach. It would stifle innovation, deter investment, and ultimately undermine the very goal of expanding connectivity.

Effectiveness of a competitive marketplace

For the past 20 years, intense competition and record-setting industry investments have resulted in increasingly more affordable and accessible broadband services for consumers. In the past decade alone, prices for broadband services have sharply declined, even as the prices for other consumer goods and services have risen. At the same time, consumers continue to receive faster speeds and improved customer value.

Building broadband networks, particularly with fiber, is incredibly expensive. A mandate would disincentivize future broadband deployment investments, and gives no considerations to the cost of building a network, the services offered on it, and the resources necessary to manage the network. Furthermore, an undetermined rate structure set by a newly created board would introduce significant market uncertainty. This regulation risks undermining the very competitive dynamics that have made broadband more accessible and affordable for Marylanders.

Verizon's Offerings to Low-Income Consumers

Verizon is deeply committed to digital inclusion and currently offers a range of high-quality, affordable broadband options to meet the needs of low-income residents across Maryland. First and foremost, we are a Lifeline provider, offering a \$9.25 monthly discount to qualified low-



12 West Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

income customers. This federally recognized program has been around since the 1980s. Additionally, we voluntarily participated in the federal Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), as well as Maryland's Emergency Broadband Benefit (MEBB), two assistance funds created in response to COVID-19. With the expiration of ACP and MEBB, Verizon voluntarily continued a low-cost broadband discount program to ensure continuity for low-income consumers. Our Verizon Forward program provides a discount of up to \$30/month, allowing customers to select the plan most appropriate for their household needs. This discount, paired with our basic FiOS or fixed-wireless plan, makes service as low as \$20/month. Finally, Verizon offers a host of affordable wireless options that do not require qualifying government programs. These include Tracfone, Visible, Total by Verizon, Walmart Family Mobile, Straight Talk, and Simple Mobile, to name a few. We offer these options not due to mandates, but in response to the demand for value-based offerings for the most price-conscious consumers.

Impact on Federal Broadband Funding (BEAD)

Internet Service Providers (ISPs) have partnered with Maryland's Office of Statewide Broadband (OSB) and individual counties to expand broadband to homes and Community Anchor Institutions (CAIs) identified as unserved or underserved. These locations are too expensive for ISPs to build without subsidy funding. This bill would further discourage ISPs from entering into non-BEAD public/private partnerships with the OSB and counties to expand their networks, limiting the education, safety, healthcare, and economic opportunities created by having such partnerships.

Finally, HB 382 poses a significant risk to Maryland's success in utilizing federal funding designed to close the digital divide, most notably the **Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program**.

In 2025, NTIA Administrator Arielle Roth stated that BEAD providers would be exempt from state laws mandating price caps for low-income customers. Additionally, Administrator Roth stated the agency would withhold BEAD funding from states that attempt to impose price regulations on BEAD providers. BEAD targets the most expensive and challenging unserved and underserved locations in Maryland. This proposed legislation threatens the **\$79.1 million** in federal funding to connect those homes. Without this federal subsidy, it would be cost-prohibitive for Verizon or other providers to complete the buildout to all of these homes. Losing BEAD funding would be counter to the State's objective of broadband for all and closing the digital divide.

Conclusion

HB 382 would create unnecessary mandates and jeopardize millions in federal funding. Verizon is already a leader in connecting low-income communities through our existing programs and



12 West Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

continued investment. We believe the best path forward is to support and leverage existing federal and industry-led programs, not to layer on new state mandates that threaten to stifle investment and jeopardize crucial federal funding. We respectfully request an unfavorable report on HB 382.

Thank you,

Paul Brooks Plymouth

Paul Brooks Plymouth

Director, State Government Affairs & Local Engagement

HB0382_EMC_Schwerbel_UNF.pdf.pdf

Uploaded by: Steven Schwerbel

Position: UNF



BROADBAND
WITHOUT
BOUNDARIES

House Economic Matters Committee
February 12, 2026

Chair Valderrama and Honorable Members of the Committee:

Thank you for holding this hearing on House Bill 382, which would require broadband providers operating in Maryland to offer a low-cost broadband plan to qualifying households.

WISPA – *The Association for Broadband Without Boundaries* is a trade association representing approximately 800 members nationally, including 5 Maryland-based companies. Our members are generally smaller network operators, but no less vital to Maryland’s economy, expanding broadband to challenging-to-serve communities quickly and cost-effectively and serving urban, suburban, and rural populations that larger providers have been unable to reach. They are able to serve these often-neglected communities by deploying reliably high-speed Fixed Wireless Access (FWA) technologies supplemented with robust fiber where cost-effective.

WISPA is concerned that HB 382 could have short-term and long-term negative consequences to our members and other small ISPs, which would negatively impact broadband availability in communities that will continue to lack alternatives.

In the short term: while many or all of our members currently serve fewer than 20,000 households and would thus qualify for a potential exemption to the low-cost mandate, experience where a similar mandate has been implemented suggests that the burden of applying for and receiving an exemption is likely to be onerous. New York, to date the only state that has currently adopted a low-cost mandate, included a similar exemption for smaller providers. However, the reporting submissions required by the Public Service Commission required hundreds of man-hours and deep economic analysis to complete. In many cases, the exemption applications themselves thus imposed significant costs to our members there – burdens which would have an even more outsized impact on our Maryland members.

Longer-term impacts pose further risks: primarily, HB 382 increases the likelihood that small ISPs serving rural areas will avoid expanding into areas they would otherwise see a business case to serve. Rural communities are more expensive to serve for several reasons: the topography often requires more expensive FWA infrastructure or increases the per-mile cost to bury fiber, and the sparsely-populated nature of these communities means that instead of considering a customers-per-mile revenue structure, our members count miles-per-customer – our members are less able to shift the cost burden this bill creates onto wealthier customers.



These customers are not only more expensive to serve, they are disproportionately likely to qualify for at least one of the programs that define eligibility for the low-income program in HB 382. These pressures mean that even with a larger customer base, WISPA members and other small ISPs may be prevented from bringing service or competition to parts of the state that need it most.

Additionally, the burden of verifying which households qualify for the mandated low-cost rate is significant. HB 382 relies on seven separate qualifying criteria to determine eligibility for the low-cost plan, but the state databases used to identify qualified individuals may not be accessible to ISPs. Where they are accessible, these databases are difficult to access and challenging to navigate. This lack of access may mean that it would be functionally impossible for an ISP to confirm whether an individual customer was truly qualified for the mandated low-cost plan.

For comparison, the federal Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) utilized a verifier database built and operated by the FCC. Had our members been required to undertake the verification of new enrollees themselves, without access to the FCC's databases, it is certain that even fewer of our members would have been able to participate.

Another comparison with the ACP is warranted: that program offered a federal subsidy to providers, which allowed more ISPs to participate in the program and ensure that they did not operate at a loss. This reimbursement was a vital component of the program's success. This model is by far a better approach to expanding affordable service to low-income Californians.

Other aspects of the bill are also troubling: limiting ISPs from considering increases to the low-cost plan to every three years, and capping any increases at 2%, makes it likely that inflation and other factors could put low-cost rates further out of alignment with market rates. ISPs should be able to respond to spikes in inflation and other market pressures at least annually.

Finally, the bill's language creates confusing reporting standards: broadband service is offered per household, but HB 382 requires ISPs to report the number of "consumers" enrolled in the program. This would force a reporting ISP to determine the number of consumers reside in a given household.

Despite numerous revisions, HB 382 will entrench and expand broadband monopolies and drive out competition. While well intentioned, its impacts risk significant harm to rural communities. WISPA strongly encourages the Committee to look to states like California, which has implemented an ACP-style reimbursement program through the Public Utilities Commission, or to New Mexico, whose state legislature is considering a bill to create a state subsidy program on these lines.



BROADBAND
WITHOUT
BOUNDARIES

Page 3

WISPA encourages you strongly to say “no” to mandates and to work with industry to find solutions that support Maryland’s home-grown ISP community, so that we can close the digital divide together.

Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions.

Sincerely,

Steven Schwerbel
Director of State Advocacy

HB 382_Choptank_Connelly_UNF.pdf

Uploaded by: Valerie Connelly

Position: UNF



**Choptank Electric
Cooperative**

P.O. BOX 430, Denton, MD 21629
Toll-Free: 1-877-892-0001
www.choptankelectric.coop

February 10, 2026

The Honorable Kriselda Valderrama
Economic Matters Committee
231 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Opposition to HB 382 – Commercial Law – Broadband Access – Low-Income
Consumer Programs

Dear Chair Valderrama and Members of the Committee:

I am writing on behalf of Choptank Electric Cooperative and our wholly owned subsidiary, Choptank Fiber, LLC, to oppose HB 382 as drafted. If implemented, this bill has the potential to lower subscription revenues below the level needed to maintain and operate our community-owned broadband business.

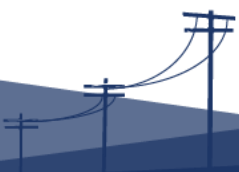
As drafted, SB 382 includes a comprehensive list of eligibility criteria that would place most of Choptank Fiber's customers in the "low-income consumer" category. The bill also requires broadband companies to collect and analyze personal financial data about customers, which is something we are not set up to do.

As many of you recall, Choptank Electric Cooperative worked with this Committee in 2020, on legislation to make it possible for us to construct broadband infrastructure to serve families across the Eastern Shore who had been left behind by other providers. At the time, at least 40% of Choptank Electric Cooperative's member-owners had no access to reliable, high-speed internet service. With the help of this Committee and an overwhelming majority in the Maryland General Assembly, Choptank was allowed to form a broadband business and construct infrastructure to offer internet access where other companies could not or would not go.

With the cooperative model guiding our business development, Choptank Fiber was formed as a subsidiary of Choptank Electric Cooperative with a break-even financial plan to allow the maximum investment in infrastructure development and broadband service offerings.

We partnered with local governments and the Office of Statewide Broadband to leverage grant funding to be as efficient as possible. And we borrowed money with the expectation of a long payback period to make recovering the investment affordable for our subscribers.

We are proud to report that over the last 5 years Choptank has made broadband internet service available to over 14,000 previously unserved families. We currently have 5,600 subscribed customers and are working to increase our take-rate in our service territory.



One of the primary cooperative principals is “Concern for Community.” To this end, Choptank Fiber offers a **Low-Income Access Program** to customers who qualify for energy assistance in Maryland. Those customers receive a \$30 per month discount on their broadband subscription, bringing our 100Mbps symmetrical service down to \$54.95. We have no data caps and no equipment rental fees. We also provide managed Wi-Fi and internet safeguards through our Command IQ app, which is also offered free of additional charge to our customers.

Our subscription rates and our business model were designed to support the construction, maintenance and debt service of our fiber business over the long term. To maintain a high quality of service, we must be able to upgrade the technical components at regular intervals.

In a recent customer satisfaction survey of Choptank Fiber subscribers, our Net Promoter Score (NPS) was +80. The goal of an NPS survey is to be on the positive side of a range between -100 and +100. Our customers praised the quick response of our local teams when addressing questions or outages, particularly those specific to rural communities where large farm equipment and hunting seasons can impact service. Choptank Fiber was voted Best of the Best in the Community Choice Awards for the Chesapeake region in 2024.

Unfortunately, as drafted, HB 382 has the potential to upend all the work put into creating our no-home-left-behind broadband company. We have been working with the sponsor, Del. Kris Fair, to identify potential amendments to address our concern. We have suggested the following amendment:

On page 2 of HB 382, after line 22 insert:

THIS SUBTITLE DOES NOT APPLY TO A COMMUNITY OWNED INTERNET SERVICE PROVIDER ESTABLISHED BY A NOT-FOR-PROFIT COOPERATIVE OR MUNICIPALITY IN MARYLAND.

Without this amendment, Choptank Electric Cooperative recommends an UNFAVORABLE REPORT on HB 382.

Sincerely,



VALERIE T. CONNELLY
Vice President of Government Affairs & PR