



HOWARD COUNTY OFFICE OF COUNTY EXECUTIVE

3430 Courthouse Drive ■ Ellicott City, Maryland 21043 ■ 410-313-2013 Voice/Relay

Calvin Ball
Howard County Executive
cball@howardcountymd.gov

www.howardcountymd.gov
FAX 410-313-3051

February 23, 2026

The Honorable Kriselda Valderrama, Chair
Economic Matters Committee
230 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: **TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT of House Bill 382**: Commercial Law – Broadband Access - Low -Income Consumer Programs (Maryland Broadband Opportunity & Fairness Act)

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

The ability to utilize internet service is no longer a luxury. It's imperative for success in our society. Without Internet service, students are unable to complete home assignments, adults cannot search for employment or complete job applications, patients without transportation are unable to use telehealth and seniors living away from family members are isolated. I want to express my appreciation to Delegate Kris Fair for his leadership on House Bill 382 (HB382).

Since 2018 Howard County has deployed free public Wi-Fi to 32 locations throughout the County.

Specifically in Western Howard County, where we saw the largest gap in coverage and service prior to 2018; we partnered with Verizon to provide internet service for over 400 homes. This partnership allowed us to further connect and expand our network, providing free public Wi-Fi at locations such as Gary J. Arthur Community Center, Western Regional Park, and the Howard County Fair Grounds.

Sports play such a critical role in the lives of children in Howard County. This is why we made it a priority to expand our network and provide free public Wi-Fi at Rockburn park after I became County Executive. Whether you are on the playground, or watching football, soccer, baseball, or lacrosse you can now stay connected and stream the games for all to see. In addition to Rockburn park we also partnered with CAC and BGE to provide free public Wi-Fi to residents in mobile home parks along the route one corridor.

Residents also now have access at all Howard County public libraries, community and senior centers, parks, and fire stations. The demand for this service is evident by the number of residents connecting to Howard County's public wireless network. Moreover, our community centers now provide free public Wi-Fi to more than 100 people on a daily basis. In 2025 at the Columbia Lakefront 4th of July celebration there were 1815 people connected to our public network. At the Howard County Fair in 2025, more than 200 people were connected each day. From our libraries and parks to our open spaces and fire stations, we are keeping our community connected all throughout the county.

While internet access is great when residents are out and about, the ability to access broadband from home is preferred and still badly needed.

The Federal Affordable Connectivity Program provided \$30.00 per month for low-income residents to obtain internet service. However, Congress chose not to fund this successful program, which has left millions across our country without internet access.



HOWARD COUNTY OFFICE OF COUNTY EXECUTIVE

3430 Courthouse Drive ■ Ellicott City, Maryland 21043 ■ 410-313-2013 Voice/Relay

Calvin Ball
Howard County Executive
cball@howardcountymd.gov

www.howardcountymd.gov
FAX 410-313-3051

Passing House Bill 382, which requires Broadband providers to offer a low-income consumer program with minimum speeds of 100 megabits per second download speed and 20 megabits per second upload speed for a household of two or less; or 200 megabits per second download speed and 20 megabits per second upload speed for a household of three or more, would support jurisdictions efforts to reduce the digital divide that impacts our eligible residents.

For these reasons, I urge the Committee's **favorable report on HB382**.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Calvin Ball', is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Calvin Ball
Howard County Executive