



Senate Bill 571

Commercial Law – Broadband Access – Low Income Consumer Programs
In the Senate Finance Committee
Hearing on February 26th, 2026
Position: FAVORABLE

Maryland Legal Aid submits its testimony in favor of SB571 at the request of Senator Ellis.

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.

SB571 establishes a program requiring Internet Service Providers in Maryland to offer low-cost internet service plans to qualifying customers. These programs are to offer competitive high-speed rates depending on the number of household members. **MLA asks the Economic Matters Committee for a favorable report on SB571.**

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, Maryland has made great effort to utilize grant program funds to update our broadband infrastructure. As of November of 2025, [99.5% of Maryland is now connected to or has been awarded funding for high-speed, reliable internet](#). SB571 helps ensure that these investments deliver in full on their economic and social value. In our modern world the internet is no longer a luxury and instead a utility. Broadband connection is a lifeline to medical or telehealth services, employment, education, social connection and advocacy; you cannot submit written testimony to this body or sign up to testify in person without connection to the internet.

Ready access to affordable broadband connections improves the lives of low-income Marylanders and will improve the quality of our service to them. Unreliable and expensive broadband options are a direct impediment to access to justice, whether it be rectifying a benefits decision, negotiating with a landlord, collecting personal finance information for a consumer case, or learning about free civil legal services providers. SB571 is an opportunity to remove this barrier so that Marylanders can thrive and take full advantage of the investments made to improve our infrastructure.

Maryland Legal Aid urges a favorable report on SB571. If you have any questions please contact Meaghan McDermott, Advocacy Director for Community Lawyering and Development (mmcdermott@mdlab.org), or Amanda Wisniewski, Community Outreach Manager (acwisniewski@mdlab.org).