



**SB571: Commercial Law-Broadband Access-Low Income Consumer Programs
(Maryland Broadband Opportunity and Fairness Act)
Position: Favorable**

February 26, 2026

The Honorable Pam Beidle, Chair
Senate Finance Committee
3 East, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
cc: Members, Senate Finance

Chair Beidle and Members of the Committee,

Economic Action Maryland Fund is here in strong support of SB571.

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 SB571 and urge a favorable report.

Best,

Jennifer Bevan-Dangel
Deputy Director

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