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**TESTIMONY ON SB#0571- POSITION: FAVORABLE**

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

**TO:** Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes and members of the Finance Committee

**FROM:** Richard Keith Kaplowitz

**My name is Richard Keith Kaplowitz. I am a resident of District 3, Frederick County. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB#0571, Commercial Law - Broadband Access - Low-Income Consumer Programs (Maryland Broadband Opportunity and Fairness Act)**

The University of Wisconsin-Madison [Community Economic Development](#) Division of Extension has produced a report *Broadband 101 – Benefits of Broadband: Where do we go from here?*<sup>1</sup>

**REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT & COMMUNITY WELL-BEING**

Research has consistently found a strong positive relationship between internet access, particularly broadband, and economic growth and development. ... It is clear that access to the internet and broadband in particular is no longer a luxury, but a necessary condition for regional economic growth and development.

**Population and Employment**

If communities are attempting to attract new residents with the perspective that jobs follow people, new residents may be reluctant to move ... without broadband access.

- Similarly, when choosing between two otherwise similar communities, people may select to relocate to the one with more readily available broadband.
- In contrast, if communities are attempting to create new employment opportunities with the viewpoint that people follow jobs, it is possible that a lack of broadband could constrain job growth and deter new residents from moving into a community.
- In particular, businesses in rural communities without access to online markets, suppliers, and productive technologies are at a disadvantage which could result in lower levels of job growth.

**Education**

Educational and professional development opportunities, whether formal or informal, increasingly depend on access to the internet and broadband. ... Indeed, businesses that invest in new technologies or pieces of equipment are finding that access to broadband is necessary as more vendors move documentation to online-only formats. The push for online learning motivates the question of a link between broadband access and student outcomes in the form of testing scores.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://economicdevelopment.extension.wisc.edu/articles/broadband-101-where-do-we-go-from-here/>

### **Health Outcomes**

The link between broadband and health care is often considered through the lens of telehealth where patients can access medical health practitioners through web conferencing (e.g., Jennett 2003). Increasingly, practitioners can conduct in-house visits and access necessary technologies through the internet. These connections, however, require broadband-level speeds and consistent connection quality. Health outcomes can also increase through access to health care information such as internet-based counseling, coaching, and educational materials. (Deller 2020). "...a lack of access to the internet and broadband could be associated with higher levels of fair to poor health and a higher number of poor mental health days..."

The intent of this bill is to require certain broadband providers in the State to establish a program to provide certain broadband services to eligible low-income consumers on or before December 1, 2026; authorizing the Office of Statewide Broadband in the Department of Housing and Community Development to exempt certain providers from the requirement to establish a program; altering the duties of the Office; and establishing a Broadband Affordability Advisory Board.

Research has shown how important this broadband access is and the positive effects of expanding that access.

**I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB#0571.**