

SB0571
Maryland Broadband Opportunity and Fairness Act 2026
Economic Matters
February 26, 2026
Favorable

Catholic Charities of Baltimore supports Senate Bill 0571, 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 Senate Bill 0571.

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