



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

**Senate Finance Committee**

**February 26, 2026**

**POVERTY FREE MARYLAND**

**Poverty Free Maryland** envisions a Maryland without poverty, and a future where all Marylanders have the support and economic stability that's needed to thrive. **For this reason, Poverty Free Maryland strongly supports SB571.**

House Bill 0382 would require certain broadband service providers to establish affordable broadband programs for eligible low-income households, ensure those programs meet basic service standards, and require transparent, public-facing advertising so families know these options exist.

National data underscores the urgency. In 2019, individuals living below 100 percent of the federal poverty level were 28 percent less likely to have broadband access than individuals at or above 400 percent of the federal poverty level. This gap has real consequences for economic mobility, education, and health.

For low-income families, broadband access is no longer optional. Students need reliable internet to complete homework and participate fully in school. Workers need broadband to search for jobs, apply for positions, and access remote employment opportunities. Low-income individuals rely on internet access to manage public benefits such as SNAP, Medicaid, energy assistance, and Social Security, all of which increasingly depend on online applications and digital communication. Without affordable broadband, many Marylanders face unnecessary barriers to food security, health care, and housing stability.

SB571 strengthens Maryland's broadband policy by embedding affordability, transparency, and accountability into law. For these residents, broadband access is a lifeline, supporting education, benefit management, and economic mobility.

Ensuring affordable broadband is a critical step toward reducing poverty and expanding opportunity across Maryland. For these reasons, Poverty Free Maryland respectfully urges the Senate Finance Committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** report on SB571.

*Founded in 2025 through the merger of Welfare Advocates (established in 1979) and Marylanders Against Poverty (established in 1988), **Poverty Free Maryland** is a coalition of service providers, faith groups, and other organizations working together to exchange information, educate decisionmakers, and advocate for statewide public policies and programs necessary to address the underlying systemic causes of poverty and ensure that low-income Marylanders are provided with low- and no-barrier access to all resources needed to thrive and build a better life for the future.*

### **Voting Member Agencies:**

Anne Arundel County Food Bank

Baltimore Jewish Council

CASH Campaign of Maryland

Catholic Charities

Family League of Baltimore

Laurel Advocacy & Referral Services, Inc.

Maryland Center on Economic Policy

Maryland Family Network

Maryland Food Bank

Maryland Hunger Solutions

**Poverty Free Maryland**

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