



SB 571 - Commercial Law - Broadband Access - Low-Income Consumer Programs (Maryland Broadband Opportunity and Fairness Act)
Senate Finance Committee
February 26, 2026
SUPPORT

Chair Beidle, Vice-Chair, and members of the committee thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Senate Bill 571. We support this because affordable, reliable internet access is no longer a luxury. It is essential infrastructure for economic stability, education, and full participation in the workforce and economy.

The CASH Campaign of Maryland promotes economic advancement for low-to-moderate income individuals and families in Baltimore and across Maryland. CASH accomplishes its mission through operating a portfolio of direct service programs, building organizational and field capacity, and leading policy and advocacy initiatives to strengthen family economic stability. CASH and its partners across the state achieve this by providing free tax preparation services through the IRS program 'VITA', offering free financial education and coaching, and engaging in policy research and advocacy. **Almost 4,000 of CASH's tax preparation clients earn less than \$10,000 annually. More than half earn less than \$20,000.**

The digital divide refers to “the gap between those who have access to technology, the internet and digital literacy training and those who do not. It affects all generations – both rural and urban communities – and a wide variety of industries and sectors.”¹ This divide disproportionately impacts low-income households, black communities and communities of color, seniors, and rural communities. Recently, we have also seen an increase of the digital divide impacting our youth. When families lack internet access at home, they are effectively locked out of critical systems such as education, employment, and public benefits.

CASH sees the consequences of the digital divide through our work with our clients. Without internet access at home, individuals face:

- Difficulty applying for jobs and responding to employer communications,
- Barriers to applying for public benefits such as SNAP, Medicaid, or housing assistance,
- Challenges tracking application statuses, submitting required documentation, and meeting deadlines, and
- Limited ability to enroll in education, training, or workforce programs

These barriers compound economic instability and make it harder for families to move forward.

CASH also witnessed these challenges firsthand while serving as the nonprofit administrator for Baltimore City's guaranteed income program, which provided 200 young parents with \$1,000 per month for 24 months. During the application period, we had to establish computer access sites across the city to limit the impact of the digital divide. Without these in-person sites, many eligible families would have been excluded solely because they lacked internet access at home.

SB 571 addresses this inequity by requiring large broadband providers to offer a meaningful, low-cost broadband option that meets household needs.

¹ <https://www.ncbroadband.gov/digital-divide/what-digital-divide>



Thus, we encourage you to return a favorable report for SB 571.

Creating Assets, Savings and Hope