

Written Testimony (Support)

Bill: SB 571 – Maryland Broadband Opportunity and Fairness Act

Position: Favorable

Submitted by:

Gretchen LeGrand, Senior Program Officer

The Robert W. Deutsch Foundation

2519 N Charles St.

Baltimore, MD 21218

gretchen@rwdfoundation.org

The Honorable Senator Pamela Beidle

3 East Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee:

I am submitting this testimony in strong support of Senate Bill 571, the Maryland Broadband Opportunity and Fairness Act.

At this point, internet access is no longer a luxury; it is a basic utility. Reliable broadband is essential for education, employment, health care, access to public benefits, and civic participation. Yet unlike electricity, water, or even basic phone service, broadband remains largely unregulated at the federal level, allowing a small number of multibillion-dollar corporations to extract high prices from captive markets with little accountability.

SB571 addresses a clear and persistent market failure. In much of Maryland, households have only one realistic option for high-speed internet. Prices are set not by competition, but by monopoly or near-monopoly conditions. As a result, families, particularly low-income households, are forced to choose between internet access and other necessities such as food, medicine, housing, or utilities. This bill does not cap prices broadly or regulate the entire market; instead, it establishes a reasonable affordability floor for households already eligible under widely accepted income criteria.

The bill's approach is pragmatic and balanced. It applies only to providers with a significant market presence, allows exemptions when compliance would cause genuine financial hardship, and permits modest, inflation-linked price increases. Importantly, it also requires transparency; ensuring that low-income plans are clearly advertised and offered on the same terms and conditions as standard plans, rather than hidden behind unnecessary barriers.

SB571 recognizes that broadband *functions* like a utility and should be treated accordingly when the market fails to deliver equitable access. By requiring providers to offer a meaningful low-cost option, Maryland is not overreaching; it is doing what states have historically done when essential infrastructure becomes indispensable to daily life.

Finally, the bill aligns with the State's broader investments in broadband infrastructure and digital equity. Public dollars are being used to expand networks across Maryland. It is both reasonable and responsible to ensure that residents can afford to use the infrastructure they helped pay for.

For these reasons, I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on SB571.
Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gretchen LeGrand', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Gretchen LeGrand