



12 West Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Bill No: SB 571

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

Committee: Senate Finance Committee

Hearing Date: February 26, 2026

Verizon Position: **OPPOSE**

Greetings Chair Beidle and Members of the Senate Finance Committee.

Verizon appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 571, the Maryland Broadband Opportunity and Fairness Act. We share the belief that every consumer should have access to affordable, high-performing broadband service. The low-income broadband mandate embodied in this proposed legislation is the wrong approach. It would stifle innovation, deter investment, and ultimately undermine the very goal of expanding connectivity.

Effectiveness of a competitive marketplace

For the past 20 years, intense competition and record-setting industry investments have resulted in increasingly more affordable and accessible broadband services for consumers. In the past decade alone, prices for broadband services have sharply declined, even as the prices for other consumer goods and services have risen. At the same time, consumers continue to receive faster speeds and improved customer value.

Building broadband networks, particularly with fiber, is incredibly expensive. A mandate would disincentivize future broadband deployment investments, and gives no considerations to the cost of building a network, the services offered on it, and the resources necessary to manage the network. Furthermore, an undetermined rate structure set by a newly created board would introduce significant market uncertainty. This regulation risks undermining the very competitive dynamics that have made broadband more accessible and affordable for Marylanders.

Verizon's Offerings to Low-Income Consumers

Verizon is deeply committed to digital inclusion and currently offers a range of high-quality, affordable broadband options to meet the needs of low-income residents across Maryland. First and foremost, we are a Lifeline provider, offering a \$9.25 monthly discount to qualified low-



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income customers. This federally recognized program has been around since the 1980s. Additionally, we voluntarily participated in the federal Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), as well as Maryland's Emergency Broadband Benefit (MEBB), two assistance funds created in response to COVID-19. With the expiration of ACP and MEBB, Verizon voluntarily continued a low-cost broadband discount program to ensure continuity for low-income consumers. Our Verizon Forward program provides a discount of up to \$30/month, allowing customers to select the plan most appropriate for their household needs. This discount, paired with our basic FiOS or fixed-wireless plan, makes service as low as \$20/month. Finally, Verizon offers a host of affordable wireless options that do not require qualifying government programs. These include Tracfone, Visible, Total by Verizon, Walmart Family Mobile, Straight Talk, and Simple Mobile, to name a few. We offer these options not due to mandates, but in response to the demand for value-based offerings for the most price-conscious consumers.

Impact on Federal Broadband Funding (BEAD)

Internet Service Providers (ISPs) have partnered with Maryland's Office of Statewide Broadband (OSB) and individual counties to expand broadband to homes and Community Anchor Institutions (CAIs) identified as unserved or underserved. These locations are too expensive for ISPs to build without subsidy funding. This bill would further discourage ISPs from entering into non-BEAD public/private partnerships with the OSB and counties to expand their networks, limiting the education, safety, healthcare, and economic opportunities created by having such partnerships.

Finally, SB 571 poses a significant risk to Maryland's success in utilizing federal funding designed to close the digital divide, most notably the **Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program**.

In 2025, NTIA Administrator Arielle Roth stated that BEAD providers would be exempt from state laws mandating price caps for low-income customers. Additionally, Administrator Roth stated the agency would withhold BEAD funding from states that attempt to impose price regulations on BEAD providers. BEAD targets the most expensive and challenging unserved and underserved locations in Maryland. This proposed legislation threatens the **\$79.1 million** in federal funding to connect those homes. Without this federal subsidy, it would be cost-prohibitive for Verizon or other providers to complete the buildout to all of these homes. Losing BEAD funding would be counter to the State's objective of broadband for all and closing the digital divide.

Conclusion

SB 571 would create unnecessary mandates and jeopardize millions in federal funding. Verizon is already a leader in connecting low-income communities through our existing programs and



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continued investment. We believe the best path forward is to support and leverage existing federal and industry-led programs, not to layer on new state mandates that threaten to stifle investment and jeopardize crucial federal funding. We respectfully request an unfavorable report on SB 571.

Thank you,

Paul Brooks Plymouth

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