

SB571 - Broadband Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Abby Snyder, Co-Chair

Position: FAV



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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Uploaded by: Amanda Wisniewski

Position: FAV



Senate Bill 571

Commercial Law – Broadband Access – Low Income Consumer Programs
In the Senate Finance Committee
Hearing on February 26th, 2026
Position: FAVORABLE

Maryland Legal Aid submits its testimony in favor of SB571 at the request of Senator Ellis.

Maryland Legal Aid (MLA) is a non-profit law firm that provides free legal services to the State’s low-income and vulnerable residents. Our 12 offices serve residents in each of Maryland’s 24 jurisdictions and handle a range of civil legal matters, including housing, family law, public benefits, bankruptcy and other debt collection matters, and criminal record expungement.

SB571 establishes a program requiring Internet Service Providers in Maryland to offer low-cost internet service plans to qualifying customers. These programs are to offer competitive high-speed rates depending on the number of household members. **MLA asks the Economic Matters Committee for a favorable report on SB571.**

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, Maryland has made great effort to utilize grant program funds to update our broadband infrastructure. As of November of 2025, [99.5% of Maryland is now connected to or has been awarded funding for high-speed, reliable internet.](#) SB571 helps ensure that these investments deliver in full on their economic and social value. In our modern world the internet is no longer a luxury and instead a utility. Broadband connection is a lifeline to medical or telehealth services, employment, education, social connection and advocacy; you cannot submit written testimony to this body or sign up to testify in person without connection to the internet.

Ready access to affordable broadband connections improves the lives of low-income Marylanders and will improve the quality of our service to them. Unreliable and expensive broadband options are a direct impediment to access to justice, whether it be rectifying a benefits decision, negotiating with a landlord, collecting personal finance information for a consumer case, or learning about free civil legal services providers. SB571 is an opportunity to remove this barrier so that Marylanders can thrive and take full advantage of the investments made to improve our infrastructure.

Maryland Legal Aid urges a favorable report on SB571. If you have any questions please contact Meaghan McDermott, Advocacy Director for Community Lawyering and Development (mmcdermott@mdl.org), or Amanda Wisniewski, Community Outreach Manager (acwisniewski@mdl.org).

SB0571_Maryland_Broadband_Opportunity_and_Fairness

Uploaded by: Cecilia Plante

Position: FAV



TESTIMONY FOR SB0571
Commercial Law - Broadband Access - Low-Income Consumer Programs
(Maryland Broadband Opportunity and Fairness Act)

Bill Sponsor: Senator Ellis

Committee: Finance

Organization Submitting: Maryland Legislative Coalition

Person Submitting: Cecilia Plante, co-chair

Position: FAVORABLE

I am submitting this testimony in favor of SB0571 on behalf of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. The Maryland Legislative Coalition is an association of individuals and grassroots groups with members in every district in the state. We have over 30,000 members across the state.

Maryland needs broadband for everyone. We cannot educate our children or compete effectively in business without it. Maryland has made strides in making broadband accessible throughout the state, but available and affordable are both hurdles that individuals and families must jump in order to be able to truly access broadband.

This bill, if enacted, would require all the providers of broadband in the state to create a low-cost broadband service plan that would be available to low-income customers. That plan would have to support –

- a minimum broadband speed of
- 100 megabits per second download speed and 20 megabits per second upload speed for a household of two or less OR
- 200 megabits per second download speed and 20 megabits per second upload speed for a household of three or more
- at least 1.2 terabytes of data storage
- a latency that is sufficiently low to allow reasonably foreseeable, real-time, interactive applications.

A provider may, once every 3 years, increase the price of broadband service provided under the provider's program by the lesser of: the most recent change in the Consumer Price Index for all urban consumers, or not more than 2% per year. There are exceptions in the bill for service providers that provide broadband to a relatively small number of consumers, or if the provision of a low-cost service is not practical.

We must do everything we can to ensure that **all** the residents of the state have the same access to information. The Maryland Legislative Coalition supports this bill and we recommend a **FAVORABLE** report in Committee.

SB571_RWDF_LeGrand_Fav.pdf

Uploaded by: Gretchen LeGrand

Position: FAV

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 be 'Gretchen LeGrand', with a stylized, cursive script.

Gretchen LeGrand

SB571 EconAction FAV.docx.pdf

Uploaded by: Jennifer Bevan-Dangel

Position: FAV



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

February 26, 2026

The Honorable Pam Beidle, Chair
Senate Finance Committee
3 East, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
cc: Members, Senate Finance

Chair Beidle and Members of the Committee,

Economic Action Maryland Fund is here in strong support of SB571.

As public and private products and services increasingly move online, access to broadband and other digital tools is a necessity rather than a luxury. Increasingly banking, credit cards, tax credits, utilities, public assistance, medical appointments and prescriptions, and bill payment have moved online and reduced the number of workers who used to answer calls from individuals.

Access to fast, reliable, and affordable broadband service is critical to engage in public life, pay bills, access credit and much more. Yet, for too many Marylanders, broadband service is out of reach, limiting their ability to easily access services and products. A 2021 report found that 23% of Maryland households do not have broadband services, with Black and Brown households being disproportionately left behind¹. Lack of broadband services is an issue for both urban centers and rural Maryland.

The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) which provided support for eligible households for internet services ended in 2024. Although some internet providers offer program discounts, these discounts do not do enough to make these services affordable to households struggling to make ends meet.

With changes to SNAP and Medicare at the national level, the need for accessible, reliable broadband is more important than ever. New federal requirements will mandate that more than 80,000 SNAP recipients and 320,000 Medicare recipients in Maryland verify their work eligibility by uploading documents to a portal twice a year. Economic Action Maryland fund conducted a study in late 2025 of more than 500 Marylanders statewide on affordability and access issues.

Twenty-five (25%) of participants noted that broadband access would be a barrier to their ability to meet the eligibility requirements. In other words, affordable, accessible broadband will prevent tens of thousands of Marylanders from losing critical financial assistance.

¹ <https://abell.org/publication/disconnected-in-maryland/>

Economic Action (formerly the Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition) champions economic rights and housing justice through advocacy, research, consumer education, and direct service. Our 12,500 supporters include consumer advocates, practitioners, and low-income and working families throughout Maryland.



This program is also an investment in our children's future. Many families do not have reliable broadband service which is a barrier to children in the household completing homework reliably or using tools such as search engines to assist them in their studies. Education is a critical factor in economic mobility and lack of broadband should not be an impediment to our children's education. It should be seen as a critical investment.

For all these reasons, we support SB571 and urge a favorable report.

Best,

Jennifer Bevan-Dangel
Deputy Director

Economic Action (formerly the Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition) champions economic rights and housing justice through advocacy, research, consumer education, and direct service. Our 12,500 supporters include consumer advocates, practitioners, and low-income and working families throughout Maryland.

2209 Maryland Ave · Baltimore, MD 21218 | www.econaction.org
Marceline White · Marceline@EconAction.org | Jennifer Bevan-Dangel · Jennifer@EconAction.org

SB571 MALMB Testimony.docx.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Kovacs

Position: FAV



**Local power, collective voice
for Maryland's children, youth and families**

February 12, 2025

**SUPPORT – SB0571 - Commercial Law - Broadband Access - Low-Income Consumer Programs
(Maryland Broadband Opportunity and Fairness Act)**

Dear Delegates:

On behalf of the Maryland Association of Local Management Boards, I am writing in support of **SB0571 - Commercial Law - Broadband Access - Low-Income Consumer Programs (Maryland Broadband Opportunity and Fairness Act)** to require certain broadband providers in the State to establish a program to provide certain broadband services to eligible low-income consumers. Internet access is an essential utility. Expanding access means students have access to their homework and other educational resources. Families can seek employment, apply for benefits and take advantage of numerous services. Internet access should now be considered an essential basic need.

Local Management Boards in each county and jurisdiction in the State of Maryland work in low income neighborhoods to address the needs of children and families in their respective jurisdiction. We regularly work with families who are struggling to pay bills, managing rising rents and skyrocketing BGE bills, as well as the increasing price of groceries. Any sort of relief will help our families gain stability. Internet access is vital yet many low income families have to make the choice between that and food or housing costs.

We urge you to support SB0571 - Commercial Law - Broadband Access - Low-Income Consumer Programs (Maryland Broadband Opportunity and Fairness Act) to create more broadband access to low-income families in Maryland.

Sincerely,

Pamela M. Brown, PhD
Chair

2.24 SB 571 - Commercial Law - Broadband Access -

Uploaded by: Lonia Muckle

Position: FAV



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

SB0571 Crossover HB0382 Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Madelin Martinez

Position: FAV

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.

Submitted By: Madelin Martinez, Assistant Director of Advocacy on behalf of Meti T. Negassa,
Catholic Charities Advocacy Fellow

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

LWV SB571.pdf

Uploaded by: Nancy Lynott

Position: FAV



TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE

SB571 Commercial Law – Broadband Access – Low Income Consumer Programs (Maryland Broadband Opportunity and Fairness Act)

Position: Support

By: Linda Kohn, President

Date: February 26, 2026

The League of Women Voters of Maryland is a nonpartisan organization that works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and to influence public policy through education and advocacy. The League believes that some of the goals of social policy should be to reduce poverty among Marylanders, thereby securing equal rights and opportunity for all. In an effort to address affordability across the state, SB571 treats broadband access as a utility, an essential part of everyday functioning in today's economy. Lowering the cost of internet access will help eligible low-income households take care of essential needs.

Internet access is required to carry out many essential functions of everyday life. Educational institutions use internet-based programs in many ways, including offering instruction in certain circumstances, requiring students of all ages to have access. Healthcare is often provided online, particularly for patients with mobility issues and for mental health care and support. Many people bank and manage their financial obligations online. Internet access is also important for social interaction and reduced isolation, particularly for the elderly. Many households shop for essential items such as food and medicine online because of reduced mobility or isolation.

SB571 requires Internet Service Providers in Maryland to offer low-cost internet services across the state. The legislation sets minimum broadband speed requirements, depending on household size, allows providers to determine plan prices, and establishes an advisory board to define what a low-cost broadband service option should be. It also empowers the State's Attorney General to enforce the definition of affordability.

SB571 adds another tool to Maryland's anti-poverty arsenal, allowing low-income Marylanders to access essential goods and services. The Maryland League of Women Voters, representing over 2,000 Marylanders, urges a favorable report on HB382.

Testimony in support of SB0571 - Maryland Broadban

Uploaded by: Richard KAP Kaplowitz

Position: FAV

02/26/2026

Richard Keith Kaplowitz

Frederick, MD 21703

TESTIMONY ON SB#0571- POSITION: FAVORABLE

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

TO: Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes and members of the Finance Committee

FROM: Richard Keith Kaplowitz

My name is Richard Keith Kaplowitz. I am a resident of District 3, Frederick County. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB#0571, Commercial Law - Broadband Access - Low-Income Consumer Programs (Maryland Broadband Opportunity and Fairness Act)

The University of Wisconsin-Madison [Community Economic Development](#) Division of Extension has produced a report *Broadband 101 – Benefits of Broadband: Where do we go from here?*¹

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT & COMMUNITY WELL-BEING

Research has consistently found a strong positive relationship between internet access, particularly broadband, and economic growth and development. ... It is clear that access to the internet and broadband in particular is no longer a luxury, but a necessary condition for regional economic growth and development.

Population and Employment

If communities are attempting to attract new residents with the perspective that jobs follow people, new residents may be reluctant to move ... without broadband access.

- Similarly, when choosing between two otherwise similar communities, people may select to relocate to the one with more readily available broadband.
- In contrast, if communities are attempting to create new employment opportunities with the viewpoint that people follow jobs, it is possible that a lack of broadband could constrain job growth and deter new residents from moving into a community.
- In particular, businesses in rural communities without access to online markets, suppliers, and productive technologies are at a disadvantage which could result in lower levels of job growth.

Education

Educational and professional development opportunities, whether formal or informal, increasingly depend on access to the internet and broadband. ... Indeed, businesses that invest in new technologies or pieces of equipment are finding that access to broadband is necessary as more vendors move documentation to online-only formats. The push for online learning motivates the question of a link between broadband access and student outcomes in the form of testing scores.

¹ <https://economicdevelopment.extension.wisc.edu/articles/broadband-101-where-do-we-go-from-here/>

Health Outcomes

The link between broadband and health care is often considered through the lens of telehealth where patients can access medical health practitioners through web conferencing (e.g., Jennett 2003). Increasingly, practitioners can conduct in-house visits and access necessary technologies through the internet. These connections, however, require broadband-level speeds and consistent connection quality. Health outcomes can also increase through access to health care information such as internet-based counseling, coaching, and educational materials. (Deller 2020). "...a lack of access to the internet and broadband could be associated with higher levels of fair to poor health and a higher number of poor mental health days..."

The intent of this bill is to require certain broadband providers in the State to establish a program to provide certain broadband services to eligible low-income consumers on or before December 1, 2026; authorizing the Office of Statewide Broadband in the Department of Housing and Community Development to exempt certain providers from the requirement to establish a program; altering the duties of the Office; and establishing a Broadband Affordability Advisory Board.

Research has shown how important this broadband access is and the positive effects of expanding that access.

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB#0571.

SB 571 - MoCo _TEBS_ Morningstar_FAV (GA 26).pdf

Uploaded by: Sara Morningstar

Position: FAV



Montgomery County Office of Intergovernmental Relations

ROCKVILLE: 240-777-6550

ANNAPOLIS: 240-777-8270

SB 571

DATE: February 26, 2026

SPONSOR: Senator Ellis

ASSIGNED TO: Finance

CONTACT PERSON: Sara Morningstar (Sara.Morningstar@montgomerycountymd.gov)

POSITION: Support (Montgomery County Department of Technology and Enterprise Business Solutions)

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

Senate Bill 571 requires broadband service providers in Maryland to offer low-cost broadband access to eligible low-income consumers on or before December 1, 2026. The low-cost plans must meet the minimum speed for broadband as established by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), and households earning up to 350% of the federal poverty level would be eligible to purchase them. The bill authorizes the Office of Statewide Broadband in the Department of Housing and Community Development to exempt providers from the requirement based on certain exceptions and establishes a Broadband Affordability Advisory Board to define “low-cost broadband service.” Montgomery County Department of Technology and Enterprise Business Solutions (TEBS) supports this legislation because: (1) most providers can meet the requirements; (2) low-income families need broadband plans that meet the federal minimum broadband speeds; (3) over 250,000 low-income Montgomery County households could get access to low-cost broadband under SB 571; and (4) low-cost broadband is good for the Maryland economy.

When the federal government and Maryland partnered to offer an internet subsidy (the Affordable Connectivity Plan, ACP), 12% of Maryland low-income households enrolled (287,000 households). Thirty percent of Maryland households subscribing to broadband are low-income. Almost a quarter of low-income broadband subscribers are using a plan that does not meet the federal minimum broadband speed. And according to the United Way ALICE data (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed households), the basic survival budget for many Maryland households is 300% to 350% of the federal poverty rate. (And from 328% to 378% in Montgomery County for a single person to household of four.)

Senate Bill 571 will not jeopardize Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) funding coming to Maryland; on page 7 it is citing and implementing the BEAD requirements, 47 U.S.C § 1702. The 2021 BEAD federal law requires that states define a “low-cost broadband option” in consultation with broadband service providers receiving grants. Senate

Bill 571 mirrors that requirement by creating a Broadband Affordability Advisory Board with broadband service providers, stakeholders, and state agencies to define a low-cost broadband option as required under 47 USC Section 1702. Additionally, BEAD requires every broadband service provider receiving BEAD grants to offer a low-cost broadband service option and build broadband service to provide 100/100 Mbps (megabits per second) service. SB 571 requires these providers to offer low-cost broadband access at only the federal minimum speed of 100/20 Mbps. And finally, while BEAD funding will help bring broadband service to 9,000 Maryland households, SB 571 will help approximately 700,000 low-income households in Maryland (of which approximately 192,000 live in rural areas) be able to access affordable broadband service.

Access to low-cost broadband increases household income by 1.3% and the probability of employment by 0.9%.¹ And there is no evidence that broadband service in New York, where a similar law has been in effective since 2024, costs any more than in Maryland now. All Maryland households, regardless of income or whether they are rural or urban, need access to affordable broadband plans that meet minimal federal speed requirements. Broadband is a modern and essential service, critical for accessing employment opportunities, education, healthcare (telehealth), and government services, as well as for fostering important social inclusion in our communities. Montgomery County TEBS supports Senate Bill 571 and urges the Committee to adopt a favorable report.

ACP Enrollment & Basic Needs as % of Federal Poverty Rate Data by County

Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP): Maryland households enrolled in a benefit program or earning less than 200% of federal poverty rate to receive up to \$30 per month subsidy for internet service. The United Way calculates the budget needs for ALICE households (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed). The chart below shows the ALICE survival household budget as a percentage of the federal poverty rate.

TOTAL Maryland ACP ENROLLMENT Through January 31, 2024		2025 United Way ALICE Data % of Federal Poverty Rate to meet basic needs (2023)	
County Name	Total Subscribers	Two Seniors	Family of 4
NOT AVAILABLE	862		
Allegany County	4,809	257%	245%
Anne Arundel County	16,390	348%	361%
Baltimore City	83,772	321%	320%
Baltimore County	44,537	318%	323%
Calvert County	2,291	361%	350%

¹ George W. Zuo, "[Wired and Hired: Employment Effects of Subsidized Broadband Internet for Low-Income Americans](#)," *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, 2021, at pp.3-4.

Caroline County	1,610	270%	259%
Carroll County	3,584	313%	321%
Cecil County	4,794	308%	296%
Charles County	5,536	363%	354%
Dorchester County	2,699	266%	252%
Frederick County	6,495	349%	347%
Garrett County	1,396	246%	233%
Harford County	8,468	318%	326%
Howard County	6,646	354%	386%
Kent County	817	290%	284%
Montgomery County	25,252	368%	378%
Prince George's County	39,386	347%	325%
Queen Anne's County	1,037	321%	324%
St. Mary's County	4,156	316%	317%
Somerset County	2,451	254%	246%
Talbot County	1,066	303%	282%
Washington County	9,096	263%	264%
Wicomico County	8,325	270%	265%
Worcester County	2,247	271%	265%
TOTAL MD ACP Enrollment	287,722	308%	305%

SB571_Testimony_Cross.pdf

Uploaded by: Dr Cashenna A Cross

Position: FWA

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS

Senate Bill 571 - Maryland Broadband Opportunity and Fairness Act

Chair and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 571.

I offer this testimony as a municipal leader serving residents who experience firsthand how access to reliable broadband determines whether families can participate fully in education, employment, health services, and civic life. Broadband connectivity is no longer a luxury. It is essential infrastructure supporting economic mobility and community stability.

Senate Bill 571 takes an important step toward closing Maryland's digital divide by requiring broadband providers to establish low income consumer programs and by strengthening statewide transparency and reporting. These measures recognize that access alone is not enough. Affordability and awareness must accompany infrastructure investment.

In municipalities across Prince George's County and throughout Maryland, local governments continue to see students completing homework in parking lots, seniors unable to access telehealth services, and small businesses limited by inconsistent connectivity. Policies that expand affordable broadband directly strengthen workforce participation and long term economic resilience.

While I strongly support the intent of this legislation, several amendments would improve implementation and ensure equitable outcomes.

First, municipalities should be formally included as implementation partners to assist with outreach and enrollment. Local governments maintain the closest relationship with residents and are essential to successful adoption.

Second, the definition of low cost broadband should include clearer affordability benchmarks to ensure programs remain accessible to working families.

Third, any flexibility granted to providers regarding service speeds should include equity safeguards so historically underserved communities are not left behind.

With these amendments, Senate Bill 571 will advance fairness while maintaining accountability and measurable results for Maryland residents.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable report with amendments on Senate Bill 571.

Respectfully submitted,

The Honorable Dr. Cashenna A. Cross
Councilwoman At Large
City of Glenarden

SB571_USTelecom_UNF

Uploaded by: B. Lynn Hollansbee

Position: UNF

February 26, 2026

The Honorable Pam Beidle, Chair
Senate Finance Committee
Maryland Senate
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Subject: SB 571 – Oppose

Chair Beidle and Members of the Committee:

USTelecom – The Broadband Association (“USTelecom”)¹ and its members, America’s innovative broadband providers, are committed to delivering resilient and reliable broadband internet service to their hundreds of thousands of Maryland consumers. The broadband industry has invested more than \$2.2 trillion² in network infrastructure throughout the country since 1996—with approximately \$89.6 billion invested in 2024 alone—and USTelecom members are among the country’s top investors.

We respectfully oppose SB 571, which would impose government-mandated rate regulation on broadband providers, distort Maryland’s broadband market, and ultimately undermine private-sector investment in digital infrastructure. SB 571 sets unrealistic speed mandates, establishes eligibility criteria so broad that it would encompass most of the state’s population, and threatens to upend Maryland’s broadband ecosystem by forcing providers into unsustainable business models.

Broadband providers operate in an intensely competitive marketplace, where pricing remains consistent across states and is shaped by market dynamics rather than arbitrary government mandates. Regulatory intervention in pricing fails to account for the substantial and ongoing costs of maintaining a 24/7 network capable of delivering world-class connectivity to Maryland residents and businesses. Infrastructure deployment, network maintenance, and technology upgrades require sustained investment—investment that is jeopardized when artificial price controls undermine the financial sustainability of broadband networks.

SB 571 is De Facto Rate Regulation That Will Harm Investment & Innovation

SB 571’s attempt to mandate an “affordable broadband plan” is a government-mandated price control in disguise. By requiring providers to offer service at state-defined rates, regardless of the cost of infrastructure, network maintenance, or market conditions, the bill:

¹ USTelecom is the premier trade association representing service providers and suppliers for the communications industry. USTelecom members provide a full array of services, including broadband, voice, data, and video over wireline and wireless networks. Its diverse membership ranges from international publicly traded corporations to local and regional companies and cooperatives, serving consumers and businesses in every corner of the country.

² USTelecom, 2024 Broadband Capex Report, October 21, 2025; available at: www.ustelecom.org/research/2024-broadband-capex-report

- **Disincentivizes private investment** – Broadband providers have invested billions in Maryland’s networks, yet price controls deter further deployment, especially in rural and high-cost areas.
- **Does Not Reflect Market Trends** – Because of robust competition in the marketplace, real prices for the most popular broadband plans—those delivering between 100 and 940 megabits per second—fell 8.7 percent in just one year. Even gigabit broadband prices declined 6.2 percent in real terms. Since 2015 broadband prices have fallen 43 percent while overall consumer prices have risen 35.8 percent.³
- **Ignores Existing Affordability Programs** - The federal Broadband Equity Access and Deployment Program, (BEAD) already requires recipients to offer one low-income broadband plan and the federal Lifeline program provides eligible customers a \$9.25 broadband discount. Additionally, ISPs offer their own voluntary low-income programs, such as Verizon Forward, Comcast’s Internet Essentials, Access from AT&T, Spectrum Internet Assist, Cox’s Connect Assist and Connect2Compete, Optimum Advantage, Astound Internet First, Breezeline Internet Assist, and Mediacom Xstream Connect.⁴

Building broadband networks (particularly fiber) is incredibly expensive, especially in rural and mountainous areas. Price caps like the one adopted in New York artificially lowers the potential return on investment, making it harder for providers to justify the massive, high-risk capital needed for these builds. The threat of government rate regulation also creates significant uncertainty, discouraging new competitors from entering the state and chilling private investment.

This mandate would jeopardize Maryland’s BEAD funding. In November 2025, NTIA Administrator Arielle Roth publicly affirmed that the agency would withhold BEAD funds from states that attempt to impose price regulations on BEAD providers.⁵ Indeed last year a similar California low-income discount bill was pulled by its sponsor over fears that it would jeopardize the state’s BEAD allocation. Virginia also decided not to pursue this type of legislation over concerns with BEAD funding. Furthermore, the BEAD program is designed to do exactly what Maryland is seeking to achieve – provide all Marylanders with access to reliable and affordable broadband, however, risking that much needed funding by placing new mandates on broadband providers is contrary to that effort.

SB 571 is an Unprecedented Overreach That Will Undermine Maryland’s Broadband Market

While ensuring broadband affordability is an important policy goal, SB 571 takes an extreme and counterproductive approach that will deter private investment, destabilize pricing, and set dangerous regulatory precedents. Instead of heavy-handed price controls policymakers should work with broadband providers on sustainable, targeted affordability initiatives.

If Maryland is to remain at the forefront of innovation and economic growth, policymakers must encourage broadband expansion, not inhibit it through restrictive rate-setting policies. We urge you to work with industry to modify your proposal as currently drafted by focusing on solutions that foster

³ USTelecom, 2025 Broadband Pricing Index (November 19, 2025); available at <https://ustelecom.org/research/2025-bpi/>

⁴ CNET, Low Income Guide For All 50 States (July 19, 2025); available at <https://www.cnet.com/home/internet/low-income-internet-guide-for-all-50-states/>

⁵ See *Frequently Asked Questions and Answers Broadband Equity Access and Deployment Program*, NTIA (V16) https://broadbandusa.ntia.gov/sites/default/files/2025-11/BEAD_FAQs_V16.pdf

continued investment and ensure long-term connectivity for all Marylanders.

For these reasons, **we strongly oppose SB 571** and look forward to working with you on market-driven solutions to expand affordable broadband access across Maryland. We look forward to continuing to work with your office and committee staff on a feasible solution that achieve the goals stated in the legislation.

Respectfully,

/s/ B. Lynn Follansbee

B. Lynn Follansbee
Vice President, Strategic Initiatives & Partnerships

SB0571_UNF_MTC_Comm. Law - Broadband Access - Low-

Uploaded by: Drew Vetter

Position: UNF



MARYLAND TECH COUNCIL

ADVANCING LIFE SCIENCES AND TECHNOLOGY

Senate Finance Committee

February 26, 2026

Senate Bill 571 – *Commercial Law – Broadband Access – Low-Income Consumer Programs (Maryland Broadband Opportunity and Fairness Act)*

POSITION: OPPOSE

The Maryland Tech Council (MTC), with over 800 members, is the State's largest association of technology companies. Our vision is to propel Maryland to be the country's number one innovation economy for life sciences and technology. MTC brings the State's life sciences and technology communities into a single, united organization that empowers members to achieve their goals through advocacy, networking, and education. On behalf of MTC, we submit this letter of **opposition** to Senate Bill 571.

This bill would require broadband providers serving 10,000 or more customers to create and administer low-income broadband service programs by December 1, 2026, with mandated minimum service standards, advertising requirements, and annual reporting obligations, and would also classify violations as unfair or deceptive trade practices. MTC strongly supports the goal of expanding affordable broadband access, yet the structure and obligations embedded in Senate Bill 571 risk creating barriers rather than facilitating progress.

The bill's prescriptive service level-level requirements, including mandated minimum speeds, latency standards, and limitations on price adjustments, are inflexible in a sector where technology evolves rapidly, and network demands expand unpredictably. These conditions may quickly become outdated, compromising providers' ability to respond to emerging needs and invest in network improvements across Maryland. Additionally, the bill's significant regulatory and administrative responsibilities, including detailed annual compliance reports and mandated advertising of low-income programs, could disproportionately burden mid-sized and regional providers. These providers are key to expanding last-mile connectivity, and diverting resources toward compliance processes risks slowing deployment in the very communities the bill seeks to help.

The exemption process described in the legislation does little to reduce this uncertainty. Although the Office of Statewide Broadband may exempt providers who face undue financial hardship and serve fewer than 20,000 households, the criteria are not clearly defined, requiring providers to invest substantial time and resources in compliance planning even before they know whether an exemption is possible. Moreover, classifying noncompliance as an unfair, abusive, or deceptive trade practice heightens legal and financial risks for what may be administrative errors rather than intentional misconduct. This classification introduces exposure not typically associated with broadband affordability programs and could further deter investment and innovation.

For these reasons, the MTC respectfully urges the General Assembly to reconsider Senate Bill 571. We believe a collaborative approach that emphasizes flexibility, harmonizes with existing federal and state initiatives, and supports continued private s-sector investment will better advance our shared commitment to expanding affordable, high-quality broadband access across Maryland. We stand ready to work with legislators and State agencies to craft solutions that achieve these goals without imposing unintended barriers to progress.

For more information call:

Andrew G. Vetter

J. Steven Wise

Danna L. Kauffman

Christine K. Krone

410-244-7000

MDCC_SB 571_Unfavorable.pdf

Uploaded by: Grason Wiggins

Position: UNF



Senate Bill 571

Position: Unfavorable
Committee: Finance
Date: February 26, 2026

Founded in 1968, the Maryland Chamber of Commerce (“Maryland Chamber”) is a statewide coalition of more than 7,000 members working to develop and promote strong public policy that ensures sustained economic growth and opportunity for all Marylanders.

Senate Bill 571(SB 571) would disrupt Maryland’s broadband progress. For more than two decades, competition and regulation that fosters innovation has driven significant improvements in broadband access, speed, and affordability. Maryland consistently ranks among the top states for broadband coverage and performance. In 2024 alone, broadband providers invested nearly \$90 billion in U.S. communications infrastructure, contributing to more than \$2.2 trillion in cumulative investment since 1996. During that same period, broadband prices have declined substantially in real terms, even as speeds and service quality have improved.

Building and maintaining broadband networks—especially fiber infrastructure in rural and hard-to-reach areas—requires enormous upfront capital and long-term investment. Government mandated price caps artificially limit potential returns, making it more difficult for providers to justify high-risk infrastructure projects. Regulatory uncertainty also discourages new entrants and chills competition, which ultimately harms consumers.

Significant affordability programs already exist. BEAD requires providers receiving funds to offer a low-income plan, though federal guidance prohibits states from setting the rate. Many internet service providers have also voluntarily introduced low-income broadband options. Eligible households can receive additional assistance through the federal Lifeline program. Maryland should carefully assess the effectiveness of these existing tools before imposing sweeping price mandates.

SB 571 would jeopardize Maryland’s federal broadband funding. The National Telecommunications and Information Administration has indicated that states imposing rate regulations on BEAD-supported providers risk losing access to these critical funds. Putting those resources at risk would slow progress toward universal connectivity.

Maryland has successfully expanded broadband through market-driven policies and public-private partnerships. SB 571 would represent a significant shift towards a regulatory framework that

would deter investment and slow progress at a critical time. **For these reasons, the Maryland Chamber respectfully requests an unfavorable report on SB 571.**



2-26-26 CTIA Maryland SB 571 Opposition Testimony.

Uploaded by: Jeremy Crandall

Position: UNF



**Testimony of
JEREMY CRANDALL
CTIA**

**In Opposition to
Senate Bill 571**

**Before the
Senate Finance Committee**

February 26, 2026

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes and Members of the Committee –

On behalf of CTIA®, the trade association for the wireless communications industry, I am testifying in opposition to Senate Bill 571.

For the past 20 years, intense competition and record-setting industry investment has resulted in what is an affordability success story for consumers accessing wireless services, leading to substantial benefits for hundreds of millions of Americans nationwide, including low-income consumers. This includes:

- *Lower Prices:* In the past year, wireless prices are down 5%, and since 2010, the price of unlimited wireless plans has been cut almost 70%, adjusted for inflation, while the price per MB of mobile data has dropped 99%.¹
- *More Choice:* In 2025, 5G fixed wireless access added nearly 4 million new subscribers, representing 99% of new broadband subscriptions.
- *Record Demand:* Consumers used a record 132 trillion megabytes of mobile data last year, fueled by a historic 32 trillion MB year-over-year increase, the single largest jump in U.S. wireless history.
- *Substantial Investment:* Last year, wireless providers invested \$29 billion in private funding to improve connectivity for consumers, and more than \$219 billion since 2018.²

¹ U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics

² <https://www.ctia.org/news/2024-annual-survey-highlights>



Due in large part to these benefits, Maryland consumers can currently choose competitively priced home broadband plans. With this intense competition, providers need to offer competitive pricing to consumers, including low-income consumers.

Evidence Demonstrates Mandates Raise Prices and Lowers Competition

The evidence is clear that fierce competition among wireless carriers drives down prices and fosters investment and innovation. There is also widespread evidence that artificial price mandates and rate regulation ultimately increase prices and harm consumers.

- A recent analysis by Compass Lexecon found that price floor, rate-setting policies often hurt the consumers they are intending to help. Examples include gasoline price mandates in Hawaii resulting in higher costs for consumers; rent-control markets seeing reduced investment; and price caps on interchange fees leading to higher costs and fewer low-income consumer benefits.³
- A recent report by the Advanced Analytical Consulting Group and Northeastern University found competition in the wireless industry has served consumers much better than utilities like water and electricity service subject to rate-regulation. In Maryland between 2012 and 2022, electricity rates increased 13% and water rates increased 88% while wireless rates decreased 44%.⁴
- Price mandates drive competitors from the market and deprive consumers of choice in home broadband service. In 2025, one provider pointed to New York's broadband price mandate as the reason for ending its home broadband offering in that state.⁵

This Legislation Threatens BEAD Funding

In addition to the negative policy impacts of a pricing mandate, such an approach puts Maryland's federal Broadband, Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) funding at serious risk. Over the past year, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) has issued multiple FAQs and Policy Notices related to the BEAD Program that expressly prohibit states from setting the price for BEAD subgrantees' low-cost service options (LCSOs):

³ Compass Lexecon, Adverse Effects of Price Regulation, January 2025.

⁴ Advanced Analytical Consulting Group and Northeastern University, State Price Regulation of Wireless Services, January 2025.

⁵ <https://www.pcmag.com/news/att-kills-5g-home-internet-service-in-ny-over-15-broadband-law>



- *“... [a state must] commit that it will not enforce any law, regulation, or other enforceable obligation that regulates the rates, terms, and conditions of broadband internet service or imposes net neutrality rules, open access, or other utility-style rules on broadband internet service, against a Subgrantee or its affiliates anywhere it provides service within the State, while that Subgrantee has any subgrant that is still within its period of performance, extended period of performance, or federal interest period.”⁶*

If adopted into law, the following provisions in the bill directly violate this NTIA guidance:

- Would require BEAD subgrantees to offer an LCSO that was not “proposed by the subgrantees themselves.”
- Would enable the state to “explicitly or implicitly set the LCSO rate subgrantees must offer.”
- Would require *all* Maryland broadband providers to offer a “low-cost service option.”

CTIA’s member companies throughout the wireless industry are proud of their ongoing work to expand connectivity to more communities and provide affordable connectivity options for Maryland consumers at a time when bridging the digital divide is paramount. Policy approaches that embrace competition and innovation – and reject price mandates and rate-regulation – are proven to work. For these reasons, we strongly oppose Senate Bill 571.

⁶ https://broadbandusa.ntia.gov/sites/default/files/2025-11/BEAD_FAQs_V16.pdf

PDF_[MD] SB 571_broadband_TechNet.pdf

Uploaded by: margaret durkin

Position: UNF

February 24, 2026

The Honorable Pam Beidle
Chair
Senate Finance Committee
Maryland Senate
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SB 571 (Ellis) - Commercial Law - Broadband Access - Low-Income Consumer Programs (Maryland Broadband Opportunity and Fairness Act) – Unfavorable

Dear Chair Beidle and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of TechNet, I'm writing to share concerns on SB 571.

TechNet is the national, bipartisan network of technology CEOs and senior executives that promotes the growth of the innovation economy by advocating a targeted policy agenda at the federal and 50-state level. TechNet's diverse membership includes 103 dynamic American businesses ranging from startups to the most iconic companies on the planet and represents five million employees and countless customers in the fields of information technology, artificial intelligence, e-commerce, the sharing and gig economies, advanced energy, transportation, cybersecurity, venture capital, and finance.

TechNet is concerned that SB 571 will jeopardize Maryland's access to \$79.1 million in federal Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) funding. In our view, this bill directly conflicts with the National Telecommunications and Information Administration's (NTIA) BEAD Restructuring Policy Notice (RPN) low-cost service option (LSCO) rules, including with respect to pricing, speeds, and eligibility criteria. If enacted, the bill also would constitute the kind of state broadband regulation that violates NTIA's BEAD General Terms and Conditions (GTCs).

The eligibility criteria for the proposed low-income consumer program goes beyond those that apply to the FCC's Lifeline program. Thus, the Section 14-5105(D)(1) requirement that the Broadband Affordability Advisory Board adopt a BEAD LCSO definition that "[m]eet[s] the requirements of this subtitle" conflicts with the BEAD RPN's Lifeline-based "Eligible Subscriber" definition for the LCSO.

Various provisions of the bill violate BEAD RPN LCSO requirements and go beyond some of the affordable home internet offerings our members provide to qualifying households. These offerings include lower-priced internet plans, low-cost

computers, free Wifi hotspots, and free internet training. Moreover, on page 5, starting at line 9, the language is overly broad. Under 14-5102, sections (G) and (H) are generally problematic and don't fit in the context of this consumer-facing bill. These requirements would dictate how a private provider manages their network. Finally, in Section 14-5105 (A)(2), NTIA has already approved Maryland's plan and defined "Low-Cost Service Option".

For the reasons stated above, TechNet is opposed to SB 571 and urges an unfavorable report due to the risks it would pose to federal BEAD funding. Thank you for your consideration of our concerns. Please don't hesitate to reach out with any questions.

Sincerely,

Margaret Durkin

Margaret Durkin
TechNet Executive Director, Pennsylvania & the Mid-Atlantic

CCIA Comments on MD SB 571.pdf

Uploaded by: Megan Stokes

Position: UNF



February 26, 2026

Senate Finance Committee
Attn: Tammy Kraft
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: SB 571 - "Maryland Broadband Opportunity and Fairness Act" (Oppose)

Dear Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, and Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

On behalf of the Computer & Communications Industry Association (CCIA), I write to respectfully oppose unless amended SB 571, in advance of the Senate Finance Committee hearing on February 26, 2026.

CCIA is an international, not-for-profit trade association representing a broad cross-section of communications and technology firms.¹ Proposed regulations on the interstate provision of digital services therefore can have a significant impact on CCIA members. CCIA represents leading technology and communications companies that invest billions of dollars annually to expand broadband access, improve network performance, and deliver innovative services to consumers across the United States.

CCIA and its members strongly support efforts to expand affordable broadband access, particularly for low-income households. These comments are focused on the bill's inapt application to satellite-based broadband services, which are regulated at the federal level and often do not include the same features and functions of wireline-based broadband services.

1. SB 571 is an inappropriate attempt by Maryland **to set retail prices in a vibrantly competitive market**. It would manipulate broadband markets through artificial pricing structures, intrusive operational mandates, and legally questionable requirements. Rather than expanding access, the bill risks discouraging deployment, slowing innovation, and increasing compliance costs that ultimately harm consumers.

2. The bill includes a **requirement** that low-cost broadband offerings "include ... at least 1.2 terabytes of data storage." Data storage is typically a component of wireline broadband service. The bill would impose an obligation on satellite services that they might not provide. Moreover, apart from the incongruity of forcing satellite services to add a feature they do not provide, this provision raises additional legal concerns. This provision appears intended to extend to email hosting and/or cloud-based storage, which are products distinct from the broadband services that carry them. Here SB 571 runs into serious jurisdictional problems: the state has authority to regulate the terms and conditions under which telecommunications service is provided, but not the information services that are carried via telecommunications.

¹ For more than 50 years, CCIA has promoted open markets, open systems, and open networks. CCIA members employ more than 1.6 million workers, invest more than \$100 billion in research and development, and contribute trillions of dollars in productivity to the global economy. A list of CCIA members is available at <https://www.ccianet.org/members>.



3. Similar to the provision just discussed, SB 571 includes a requirement that satellite-based broadband must allow customers to buy “broadband service **bundled with cable television** or phone service.” This bundling mandate is another bad fit: not all providers of satellite-based broadband want to provide video programming. Though wireline-based service is often bundled, assuming that satellite-based service involves bundling is a mistake. This provision would interfere with providers’ product design, pricing, and marketing decisions, and represents an unnecessary intrusion into the competitive broadband marketplace.

4. The **bill’s definitions are internally inconsistent** and create significant uncertainty for covered providers. “Broadband service” is defined expansively to include nearly all modern broadband offerings, while the definition of “provider” is circular and conflicting. The bill initially applies to providers serving more than 10,000 customers, yet later exempts providers serving fewer than 20,000 customers from the low-income mandate. These inconsistencies make compliance difficult and invite arbitrary enforcement.

5. Beginning December 1, 2026, SB 571 would require ISPs serving more than 20,000 customers to offer a low-cost broadband option to low-income consumers at mandated speeds tied to household size—100 Mbps/20 Mbps for households of two or fewer, and 200 Mbps/20 Mbps for households of three or more. The bill provides **no clear mechanism for verifying household size**, leaving providers without workable guidance and exposing them to compliance risk. Additionally, unlike similar statutes in other states, SB 571 does not specify a rate, effectively creating artificial pricing through regulatory uncertainty.

* * * * *

For these reasons, CCIA respectfully urges the Committee to oppose SB 571. We remain committed to working with policymakers on solutions that expand broadband access while preserving competition, innovation, and lawful regulatory boundaries.

Sincerely,

Megan Stokes

State Policy Director

Computer & Communications Industry Association

SB571_Verizon_UNF

Uploaded by: Paul Plymouth

Position: UNF



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-



12 West Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

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



12 West Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

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

Paul Brooks Plymouth

Director, State Government Affairs & Local Engagement

SB 571_Choptank_Connelly_UNF.pdf

Uploaded by: Valerie Connelly

Position: UNF



**Choptank Electric
Cooperative**

P.O. BOX 430, Denton, MD 21629
Toll-Free: 1-877-892-0001
www.choptankelectric.coop

February 24, 2026

The Honorable Pamela Beidle
Finance Committee
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Opposition to SB 571 – Commercial Law – Broadband Access – Low-Income
Consumer Programs

Dear Chairwoman Beidle and Members of the Committee:

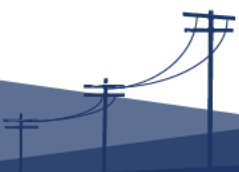
I am writing on behalf of Choptank Electric Cooperative and our wholly owned subsidiary, Choptank Fiber LLC, to oppose SB 571. If implemented, this bill has the potential to lower subscription revenues below the level needed to maintain and operate our community-owned broadband business.

As drafted, SB 571 includes an overwhelming list of eligibility criteria that would place most of Choptank Fiber's customers in the "low-income consumer" category. Specifically, eligibility for households with income below 350% of federal poverty guidelines (\$115,500 for a family of 4) includes most of the Eastern Shore, where median household income ranges between \$64,943 and \$113,347. The bill also requires broadband companies to collect and analyze personal financial data about customers, which is something we are not set up to do and believe our customers will resist.

As many of you recall, Choptank Electric Cooperative worked with this Committee in 2020, on legislation to make it possible for us to construct broadband infrastructure to serve families across the Eastern Shore who had been left behind by other providers. At the time, at least 40% of Choptank Electric Cooperative's member-owners had no access to reliable, high-speed internet service. With the help of this Committee and an overwhelming majority in the Maryland General Assembly, Choptank was allowed to form a broadband business and construct infrastructure to offer internet access where other companies could not or would not go.

With the cooperative model guiding our business development, Choptank Fiber was formed as a subsidiary of Choptank Electric Cooperative with a break-even financial plan to allow the maximum investment in infrastructure development and broadband service offerings.

We partnered with local governments and the Office of Statewide Broadband to leverage grant funding to be as efficient as possible. And we borrowed money with the expectation of a long payback period to make recovering the investment affordable for our subscribers.



We are proud to report that over the last 5 years Choptank has made broadband internet service available to over 14,000 previously unserved families. We currently have 5,600 subscribed customers and are working to increase our take-rate in our service territory. One of the primary cooperative principals is “Concern for Community.” To this end, Choptank Fiber offers a **Low-Income Access Program** to customers who qualify for energy assistance in Maryland. Those customers receive a \$30 per month discount on their broadband subscription, bringing our 100Mbps symmetrical service down to \$54.95. We have no data caps and no equipment rental fees. We also provide managed Wi-Fi and internet safeguards through our Command IQ app, which is also offered free of additional charge to our customers.

Our subscription rates and our business model were designed to support the construction, maintenance and debt service of our fiber business over the long term. To maintain a high quality of service, we must be able to upgrade the technical components at regular intervals.

In a recent customer satisfaction survey of Choptank Fiber subscribers, our Net Promoter Score (NPS) was +80. The goal of an NPS survey is to be on the positive side of a range between -100 and +100. Our customers praised the quick response of our local teams when addressing questions or outages, particularly those specific to rural communities where large farm equipment and hunting seasons can impact service. Choptank Fiber was voted Best of the Best in the Community Choice Awards for the Chesapeake region in 2024.

Unfortunately, as drafted, HB 382 has the potential to upend all the work put into creating our no-home-left-behind broadband company. We do not want to turn away families in need of broadband or otherwise limit service availability to only 9,999 customers to stay under the exemption level in the bill. We have suggested the following amendment:

On page 2 of SB 571, after line 20 insert:

THIS SUBTITLE DOES NOT APPLY TO A COMMUNITY OWNED INTERNET SERVICE PROVIDER ESTABLISHED BY A NOT-FOR-PROFIT COOPERATIVE OR MUNICIPALITY IN MARYLAND.

Without this amendment, Choptank Electric Cooperative recommends an UNFAVORABLE REPORT on SB 571.

Sincerely,



VALERIE T. CONNELLY
Vice President of Government Affairs & PR