



PEN America
Testimony on Maryland Net Neutrality 2/26/2020
By Tom Melia, Washington Director

Honorable Chairman, I am pleased to be present at today's hearing discussing the importance of Net Neutrality. As the Executive Director of PEN America's Washington D.C office, I represent an organization that protects the free speech rights of authors, journalists, and activists, both globally and domestically. Since our founding in 1922, PEN America has expanded from pioneering literature-based advocacy to building up a nationwide membership base of over 7,200 writers of disciplines spanning from poetry and fiction to journalism and blogging. Our work now includes advocating for the voices of activists around the country and the world, many of whom use online blogging and social media platforms to advocate for human rights.

At PEN, we understand the great importance that net neutrality plays in protecting against censorship online. In this age of digital communication, limitations on Internet traffic and content pose a direct threat to freedom of expression. On behalf of PEN America, I want to emphasize the positive impact that Maryland House Bill 957 will have on reinstating these protections of free speech and expression online. I thank delegates Reznik, Carr, and Charkoudian for their work in sponsoring this bill and state my support of the provisions set forth in HB957.

- PEN America is committed to the principles of free speech and stands against arbitrary censorship.
- We are opposed to ending net neutrality because it violates these basic principles.
 - PEN America promotes "unhampered transmission of thought within each nation and among all nations"
 - "Net neutrality is a fundamental part of maintaining an open internet that is equally accessible to everyone, regardless of their political perspective or financial means"
- Neutrality means equality — neutrality prevents companies from treating customers differently with regards to income status, political belief etc.
 - Ex. If a phone company could act *un-neutrally* it could not put call through because of content or charge extra fees for faster service.

- Internet is a tool for communication and artistic expression, meaning that by limiting peoples' access to the internet, you take away access to audience, livelihood, and free exchange of information
- If this bill protecting and preserving net neutrality were to fail, who would suffer most: content creators, small business owners, freelancers -- the price of equal digital visibility is higher for these stakeholders, including minorities, women, and smaller business publishers online