



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association

To the Appropriations Committee

March 11, 2021

House Bill 717 - Education – Technology Resources – Funding (Ending the Digital Divide Act)

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Chang, Delegate Guyton and members of the Appropriations Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of House Bill 717 - Education – Technology Resources – Funding (Ending the Digital Divide Act).

MRHA supports this legislation that allocates additional funding per pupil in schools to provide technology resources to students and maintain cybersecurity standards for these resources. Rural Marylanders suffer from lack of high speed, reliable broadband services. During the pandemic where Marylanders everywhere depend on reliable internet to connect them to school, work, and health care services, it is imperative that we supply the necessary resources to our rural students to allow them to access virtual classes and online material. This legislation would also provide the funding to ensure online security and safety for our students conducting their studies virtually.

Rural Maryland represents almost 80 percent of Maryland’s land area and 25% of its population. Of Maryland’s 24 counties, 18 are considered rural by the state, and with a population of over 1.6 million they differ greatly from the urban areas in the state. One of these differences, according to state law is the “changing technological and economic conditions” and “deteriorating or inadequate communications” (West’s Annotated Code of Maryland, State Finance and Procurement § 2-207.8b). In order to continue to deliver essential services to rural Marylanders, there is dire need in these communities for the implementation and maintenance of high-quality broadband services.

MRHA’s mission is to educate and advocate for the optimal health and wellness of rural communities and their residents. Membership is comprised of health departments, hospitals, community health centers, health professionals, and community members in rural Maryland. And while Maryland is one of the richest states, there is great disparity in how wealth is distributed. The greatest portion of wealth resides around the Baltimore/Washington Region; while further away from the I-95 corridor, differences in the social and economic environment are very apparent.

MRHA believes this legislation is important to support our rural communities and we thank you for your consideration.

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