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Testimony HB 97
House Economic Matters
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Position: FAVORABLE

Dear Chairman Davis & Members of the House Economic Matters Committee:

Hi, my name is Samreen Sheraz and I'm a Junior in Baltimore City College. I'm also an organizer of SOMOS or Students Organizing a Multicultural Open Society.

HB 97 would establish the Office of Digital Inclusion in the Department of Housing and Community to ensure that every resident of the State is supported by high-quality broadband Internet service at an affordable price and has the tools necessary to use and take advantage of the Internet.

We urge your favorable report for this bill.

SOMOS is a student-led organization that tackles systemic issues of injustice in schools. That is why we want your support for HB97, the Digital Connectivity Act, during this legislative session. According to the Maryland Association of Counties, "affordable high-speed internet is an essential component of a county's economic development, while a lack of reliable broadband is a major barrier to socioeconomic opportunity, health, education, and quality of life."

According to the United Nations having access to high-speed, reliable internet is a basic human right. It is crucial that the Maryland General Assembly fight for the internet Maryland students need and deserve for a 21st century education, especially during a global pandemic!

Students are being systematically denied to exercise their constitutional right to an education because they aren't getting the internet they need to stay online.

In [a recent article by Maryland Matters](#), they noted that "Baltimore lags behind the rest of the country when it comes to internet access at home according to a recent [report](#) by the Abell Foundation. That report showed that gaps in at-home internet access exist along racial lines in Baltimore: While 73.3% of white households in the city have access

to broadband at home, only 50.2 % of Black households and 46.4% of Hispanic households do.”

That means that in our city one [in every two Black and Latinx residents, and likely students, don't have access to broadband internet](#). This is a problem that hurts communities across Maryland!

The majority of our SOMOS members report frequently getting kicked-off of their classes, difficulty communicating with and understanding their teachers due to poor signal, and problems uploading assignments.

Many of my classmates are getting kicked out of their classes due to the internet. This is very harmful for the education of these students and gets in the way of their successful future.

I also have siblings who also share the same internet connection as me. Sometimes the internet shuts down for all of us and causes us to miss parts of the class and to be late in submitting our work on time.

Eamon, a Junior at Baltimore City College High School and fellow SOMOS organizer shared that he frequently has classmates who are unable to join calls for group projects because their internet isn't working. There have been times when he has been in the middle of taking a test in multiple classes and his internet just completely shuts down in all of his house. This creates not only a problem for him but also for his sister who is also a Baltimore City public school student and needs to get her school work done as well.

Samar, a Junior at Baltimore City College High School and fellow SOMOS organizer that It's hard to use the internet when it is being used on more than 3 devices in the household. Because of the load of the internet, websites take time to load which causes assignments to be submitted late and causes interference in our classes which makes it hard for him to understand what the teacher is trying to teach.

Maryland needs one central office dedicated to broadband expansion for the whole state.

We respectfully request a favorable report for HB 97.

Submitted by Samreen Sheraz, SOMOS