

BILL: HB 97

POSITION: SUPPORT

TITLE: Digital Connectivity Act of 2021

COMMITTEE: Economic Matters, 1/26/21

The Maryland Out of School Time Network (MOST) is a statewide organization dedicated to closing opportunity gaps by expanding both the quantity and quality of afterschool and summer learning opportunities for school-aged young people. MOST is one of the fifty statewide networks supported by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and serves as Maryland's affiliate to the National Afterschool Association.

MOST enthusiastically supports HB 97: Digital Connectivity Act of 2021. This coordinated, state-wide effort to bring students and families online for school, work, and out-of-school time programs would show a true commitment to the kind of systemic change that creates a more equitable future. Across the state our students have continued to struggle to log in and stay connected for classes and afterschool programs. Prior to the pandemic, just 16% of young people had access to Afterschool Programs in Maryland and more than 60% of programs maintained waitlists of 40 plus students. Many programs have pivoted to virtual learning; however, they share the same challenge with public schools. Average daily attendance has dropped by 40% with the main cause cited as lack of quality access to internet and appropriate technology. This means many fewer students receiving quality, engaging academics and out-of-school time opportunities and students that experience poverty are more likely to be impacted.

Ensuring that every resident of the state has access to high-quality broadband Internet service would reduce some of the inequities in the resources and opportunities available to students and families. Young people use the internet not just to complete school and homework assignments, but also to research and complete job applications, to research and submit college applications, connect with peers through social media platforms, create digital content, and increasingly to participate in a variety of enrichment activities both in and outside of school. Wealthy families are able to pay for a variety of enrichment opportunities for their children spending 5x as much as those in the lowest income brackets ([Afterschool Alliance, 2020](#)). These families are also able to access stable and higher quality internet.

This disparity in investment leads to very different outcomes. **Research shows that access to enrichment activities is as or even more meaningful than test scores for educational attainment, annual earnings and reduces the likelihood of risky behaviors that interrupt pathways for student success.** [The Atlantic, 2015](#).

Students and families have been raising their voices in unison across the state - They want meaningful access to high-quality broadband Internet service. It is time to listen. We look forward to collaborating with the legislature to support this bill and share state and national knowledge and resources around the impact of Internet connectivity on access to out-of-school time programs. We thank Delegate Lierman for her sponsorship of this bill and request a favorable report from the committee for House Bill 97.

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