



House Economic Matters Committee  
TESTIMONY

Submitted by Dr. Bernard J. Sadusky, Executive Director

January 26, 2021

**BILL: HB 97** – Department of Housing and Community Development – Office of Digital Inclusion – Established (Digital Connectivity Act of 2021)

POSITION: Support

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The Maryland Association of Community Colleges, representing all of Maryland's 16 community colleges, strongly supports HB 97, the Digital Connectivity Act of 2021. Equity and inclusion and the digital divide have been problems prior to our global pandemic and ones that will continue to persist after the pandemic is over if the State does not act now to put in place the necessary infrastructure to make a change. By establishing an Office of Digital Inclusion in the Department of Housing and Community Development, the State can begin to close the digital divide.

The COVID-19 impact has heightened how critical it is for our State and our communities to have reliable internet access. This has become a major clarion call for taking action. The Pew Research Center's most recent poll conducted in early April of 2020 reveals that 22 percent of families do not have reliable internet access and must use public wifi to finish their schoolwork. Maryland's community colleges have also experienced the lack of connectivity for students enrolled in our colleges. In response, the community colleges have set up public wifi hotspots in parking lots on campus so students can drive to the college and complete their assignments. The pandemic has exposed, almost overnight, how essential fast and reliable internet is for the productivity of our State and for our entire educational pipeline.

Racial inequalities also have impacted access to digital connectivity. This has tremendous ramifications for students of color and on economic opportunities as it can result in diminishing educational attainment levels. As our society shifts and changes, the State can no longer acquiesce to something that has become as fundamental to our productivity and educational goals.

MACC fully supports this legislation as a first step in addressing the long-term impacts of having a digital divide.