



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association

To the Economic Matters Committee

January 26, 2021

House Bill 97 Department of Housing and Community Development - Office of Digital Inclusion - Established (Digital Connectivity Act of 2021)

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Davis, Vice Chair Dumais, Delegate Lierman, and members of the Economic Matters Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of House Bill 97 Department of Housing and Community Development - Office of Digital Inclusion - Established (Digital Connectivity Act of 2021).

MRHA supports this legislation that ensures that every resident of Maryland is supported by high quality broadband Internet service at an affordable price. During the COVID-19 pandemic it is imperative that every resident of Maryland have access to quality broadband services to support telehealth appointments, remote work, remote school, and a variety of other services that are offered virtually.

Rural Marylanders have constantly suffered from a lack of quality broadband services. 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 Maryland 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.

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

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