

Baltimoreans for Educational Equity (BEE)
Oral Testimony in Support of The Digital Connectivity Act of 2021
January 26, 2021

To Chairperson Dereck E. Davis, Vice Chair Kathleen Dumais and the esteemed Members of the House Economic Matters Committee,

I'm Dave Heilker and I serve on the leadership team of Baltimoreans for Educational Equity (BEE). BEE is an alliance of current and former teachers, families, students, and allies who work collectively to achieve educational equity at the district, local, and state level.

Today, I come to you on behalf of our 800 members, and on behalf of the members of more almost 50 statewide advocacy groups to insist that you vote to pass **House Bill 097 -- The Digital Connectivity Act of 2021**

The BEE Leadership team and our 800 members have, in the past, organized Marylanders to center educational equity in our policy, including:

- Securing \$30 million from Baltimore city government to fund city schools over three years.
- Partnering with advocates across the city to secure \$3 million for devices and internet to give students and their families absolutely essential internet access during the pandemic.
- Organizing with partners statewide to pass the Casino Lockbox Amendment (Question 1) and to urge policymakers to pass the Blueprint for Maryland's Future

I don't tell you this to impress you, but instead to impress *upon you* that ours is an organization that will fight to ensure that, if not addressed, the **struggles of our most vulnerable people become the struggles of our leaders.**

This pandemic, in its nascence, was described as a great equalizer — but we don't believe that. Instead, we've seen this national crisis serve to bring generational trauma, educational inequity, and loss of learning into sharper contrast.

We live in the wealthiest state, in the wealthiest country, in the history of the world. But what kind of example are we setting if we don't work to provide the same opportunities for the children and families who struggle? Not just in Baltimore City, but in Somerset, and Garrett, and Allegany Counties.

Our immense wealth, and our spirited economy have not done much to provide warmth for these children — but there is hope for our kids, and it lies within each of you.

Use this hope to empower someone who hasn't had the same opportunities as you, someone who doesn't have the support system that you were fortunate enough to grow up with, or the mentorship that helped to guide you down your remarkable path.

The children of Maryland are brilliant, resilient, and resourceful, and we do a disservice to not just those children, but to our future selves, by not equipping them with the tools they need to build the best future possible.

Thank you.

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www.beequity.org