



660 N Capitol St NW  
Washington DC 20001

**Testimony HB 97**  
**House Economic Matters**

**January 26, 2021**

**Position: FAVORABLE**

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

I'm writing as the Executive Director of Libraries Without Borders US (LWB US), a non-profit organization that delivers access to information, education, and cultural resources where it's needed most. In that capacity, I oversee various connectivity programs throughout Baltimore, including computer distributions in community gardens and churches as well as a city-wide collaboration with the Enoch Pratt Free Library to provide WiFi and technology in laundromats. I also serve as a co-founder and volunteer for Baltimore's Digital Equity Coalition where I lead a coordinating body of more than 60 organizations across Baltimore who are collectively working to increase access to internet, computer, and digital skills, especially for low-income, Black, and Latinx residents who are disproportionately left behind.

In the day-to-day work that I see, both as a volunteer and co-founder of the Baltimore Digital Equity Coalition and at Libraries Without Borders, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the latent and pervasive impact of the digital divide on the everyday lives of Baltimore residents: children who are unable to attend school, adults who cannot apply for a job or access crucial benefits without a computer, seniors who cannot meet with their doctor online, tenants who cannot attend a remote court hearing, and so many others who are shut out of civic life and essential services. These residents rely on the laundromats where Libraries Without Borders works in order to access basic services through technology and computers. Through data collected in Libraries Without Borders' computer distribution program, known as ConnectED, we saw that more than 400 individuals across Baltimore need a computer at home to finish college, to write a resume, to sign up for the COVID-19 vaccine, and so much more. This divide existed long before the pandemic and will persist without a long-term strategy and clear policy goals.

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. As a recent Abell Foundation report shows, two-thirds of Maryland residents without internet live in Baltimore City and metro areas. Maryland needs one central office dedicated to broadband expansion for the whole state. We urge your favorable report for this bill.

Submitted by  
Adam Echelman  
Executive Director, Libraries Without Borders

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Echelman', is positioned to the right of the typed name and title.