

Hello,

Thank you, Chair Davis and Vice Chair Dumais and members of the Economic Matters Committee, for this opportunity to speak in support of House Bill 97, the Digital Connectivity Act of 2021.

I am Shanaysha Sauls, the President & CEO of the Baltimore Community Foundation. BCF serves the Baltimore region, primarily Baltimore City and Baltimore County. We represent 900 charitable funds, thousands of donors and more than \$200M in assets under management.

I come here with gratitude and keen urgency about the importance of bridging the digital divide. With this bill, you are addressing a game-changing opportunity to make real, tangible and scalable impact, which can bring the state together, across jurisdiction, ideological lines by connecting Marylanders and building back better.

This bill establishes connectivity as a quality of life issue and brings Maryland and its residents into the new normal regardless of jurisdiction. This bill provides benchmarks and targets for success to measure performance and to provide accountability to all stakeholders.

Just this morning, I read the national and local news, conducted work meetings, my daughters are learning---on line. I re-read an email from our health provider encouraging regularly scheduled check ups...through telehealth. And today, I'm engaging in an act of civic engagement. All online. And I can do that because I am fortunate and blessed enough to live in a neighborhood and to have the means to do so.

Connectivity. What has become an accessory is now a necessity and a determinant for life. From education and information to mental and physical health as well as workforce, a gap stands in our way. In fact, at this moment, to get the COVID vaccine, to register for unemployment, one must have online access—life and the pursuit of happiness requirements for many Marylanders.

Statewide connectivity might be seen as daunting and impossible—too diverse a state, too complicated and too expensive. But let's look to Nevada. By the end of December, after nine months of collaboration, coordination and execution, the state of Nevada—mostly rural with just a few metropolitan areas—connected every student to internet and provided them with a device. By extension, it connected households to work, services, information, and to loved ones.

What will be able to say that we did at the end of 2021? Please pass this bill favorably out of committee.