

Economic Matters
HB97
Digital Connectivity Act of 2021
January 26, 2021
SUPPORT

January 21, 2021

Dear Economic Matters Committee Members,

The Robert W. Deutsch Foundation invests in innovative people, projects, and ideas that improve the quality of life in Baltimore and beyond. For over thirty years the Foundation has brought a lens of racial equity and a commitment to actions that challenge those inequities to our grant making, priority setting process, programming and strategic planning in the city of Baltimore.

Today we express our unequivocal support for HB97, and the establishment of an Office of Digital Inclusion in the Department of Housing and Community Development. As a place-based funder, we witness--and are asked to mitigate--the daily impact of the digital divide. Across the city of Baltimore, more than 40% of the population lacks home internet access, approximately 96,000 households, the majority of which are Black and Latinx¹. Black and Latinx residents are not only the most impacted by Baltimore's digital divide, but are also the most likely to suffer from educational setbacks, economic loss, and compromised health conditions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Income inequality, biased credit scoring and other forms of systemic racial discrimination are just some of barriers that low-income populations and communities of color continue to face. These households are denied the power of broadband to apply for jobs, pursue educational opportunities, participate in civic life and organize for social change.

Nearly eleven months into the COVID-19 pandemic, we must tackle the impact of the digital divide, as broadband inequities are cast in sharper relief. Whether students who cannot attend school; isolated seniors who cannot do a telehealth visit; immigrant business owners unable to transition to digital storefronts; or neighborhood leaders who are blocked from civic engagement, the challenge of the digital divide underscores the undeniable relationship between broadband and full participation in today's society.

¹ Abell Foundation. "Baltimore's Digital Divide: Gaps in Internet Connectivity and the Impact on Low-Income Residents." Updated May 2020. <https://abell.org/publications/baltimores-digital-divide-gaps-internet-connectivity-and-impact-low-income-city>

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Establishing the Office of Digital Inclusion will help to ensure that every resident in the state, regardless of zip code, immigration or economic status is supported by *fast, affordable and reliable* broadband service.
society.

We know digital equity is about more than access to devices and strong internet connections, it's a leveler of society and a precursor to racial and economic justice. Now more than ever we must acknowledge our economic future depends on everyone having access to this vital resource.

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For the reasons stated above, the Robert W. Deutsch foundation respectfully requests a favorable report on HB97.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Amalia Deloney', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

amalia deloney