

Testimony in Support of House Bill 97  
Department of Housing and Community Development - Office of Digital Inclusion - Established  
(Digital Connectivity Act of 2021)  
Economic Matters  
January 26, 2021  
1:30 PM

Pokuua Owusu-Acheaw  
Government Relations

The Maryland State Education Association supports House Bill 97 that establishes the Office of Digital Inclusion, in the Department of Housing and Community Development, 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.

MSEA represents 75,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland's public schools, teaching and preparing our 896,837 students for careers and jobs of the future. MSEA also represents 39 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3 million-member National Education Association (NEA).

MSEA believes that broadband internet access should be a public utility, available to every community in our state. This bill adds a necessary addition to the establishment of the Office of Rural Broadband, because issues of broadband access are not exclusive to just rural communities. Beyond availability, MSEA supports legislation that addresses the broadband needs of students and educators. Additionally, MSEA is in support of the requirement that the Director of a to be formed Office of Digital Inclusion, created by this bill, coordinate with the Maryland State Department of Education, and more specifically the State Superintendent, to collaborate on the efforts of the Office of Digital Inclusion, to meet the individualized needs of local education agencies.

**MSEA requests a favorable report on House Bill 97.**