

**Testimony in support of
HB97 – Digital Connectivity Act
House Economic Matters Committee
Tuesday, January 26, 2021**

Honorable Committee Chair Davis, Vice Chair Dumais and Distinguished Delegates:

On behalf of the Maryland Library Association and the Maryland Association of Public Library Administrators, we applaud the legislative leadership behind the Digital Connectivity Act and ask that you fully support its passage.

As Marylanders, public servants, and information access professionals, we know too well that many citizens lack critical access to affordable internet. Statewide data show that factors such as race, income, and geography create additional barriers to access. In our own counties- Cecil and Prince George's- the percentage of residents who lack home internet access is 15% and 12%, respectively. While our two counties do not share many demographic or economic similarities, this unfortunate similarity is striking. Far too many Marylanders are being left behind due to a lack of digital connectivity- in work, in school, and in life.

During the past two decades, public libraries have provided the only means for accessing computers and the internet to the hundreds of thousands of citizens who lacked access at home. Throughout the pandemic, the public's need for digital connection has become even more urgent as life, information, and access has shifted to the virtual world. Maryland's public libraries are leading the way when it comes to narrowing the digital divide by providing wireless access in our parking lots, loaning laptops and mobile hot-spots, using our Bookmobiles as traveling hotspots to take internet to the far reaches of our counties, and allowing limited access to computers within our buildings. But this is not enough- far too many citizens are being left behind at a time when expedient access to information and services- especially those coming from the public health and government realms- can be as important as life and death.

Having worked on the frontlines of the digital divide since the first public computers were installed in public libraries across the state in the late 1990s, we know that citizens who lack internet services in their homes for three reasons: 1) broadband is inaccessible in their region 2) home internet is not affordable and 3) they lack knowledge and confidence on using the internet and other digital resources effectively. The Digital Connectivity Act powerfully addresses all three in seeking to advance a more connected, inclusive, and empowered citizenry.

Once again, on behalf of all of Maryland's public libraries and their leadership, we so look forward to a time when all Marylanders have affordable, accessible, informed access to the digital world. Please support the Digital Connectivity Act of 2021 (HB97/SB66), and consider Maryland's public libraries enthusiastic partners in its successful implementation.

Sincerely,

Morgan Miller
Executive Director, Cecil County Public Library
President- Maryland Library Association

Roberta R. Phillips
Chief Executive Officer, Prince George's County
Memorial Library System

*President- Maryland Association of Professional
Library Administrators (MAPLA)*