

To Chairperson Dereck E. Davis, Vice Chair Kathleen Dumais and Members of the House Economic Matters Committee,

My name is Joy Lawson and I am a proud Anne Arundel County resident.

I am a parent of two wonderful elementary students and a volunteer with Anne Arundel County public school system. I have personally experienced the hard work and dedication of district staff, teachers, parents, and students in bridging the digital divide.

As such, I support a statewide effort to close this gap through the implementation of the Digital Connectivity Act of 2021.

A consistent theme emerged in my conversations with educator friends and families in Anne Arundel, Baltimore City, Prince George's, Howard, and Baltimore County: access to reliable, affordable wired internet is critical to the long term success of students, families, and communities.

Here are a few stories I heard from friends during the pandemic:

- Educators are taking time to check in on families and students who struggle with staying online due to slow, unreliable internet.
- Frustrated students choosing to use their mobile device data or travelling to sit outside our public libraries in order to access their classes due to not having access to wired internet.
- Parents have to trade off work hours with student school hours due to their internet only having the strength to keep online few, but not all, connected devices in the home.

Communities are working hard to implement the lessons they learned during this crisis. However, all that preparation is wasted if we don't take statewide action to close the digital divide.

I support the Digital Connectivity Act of 2021 (HB97/SB66) because it will redistribute the resources necessary to ensure that every student and family is connected. Further, I believe that the stated statewide audit will collect invaluable information regarding the root causes that are prohibiting suburban, rural, and urban from accessing wired internet.

Please pass the Digital Connectivity Act of 2021 and ensure kids can learn, adults can work, and communities can thrive.

Warmly,

Joy Lawson

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Linthicum Heights

Resident District 32