



January 22, 2021

Written Testimony for HB0097

Thank you, Chairpersons and Committee Members, for allowing me the opportunity to testify in favor of HB0097. My name is McKenzie Allen and I am the executive director of the Maryland Alliance of Public Charter Schools (also known as MAPCS). MAPCS is a nonprofit organization comprised of charter school operators from across the state. We represent over 21,000 students in 46 schools over six districts.

Our public charter schools, like all public schools, were deeply impacted by the pandemic. Between the abrupt closure of schools, unclear reopening dates, and students and families left in the dark – we saw our already inequitable education systems become even more inaccessible across the state. Whether it be our schools in rural, suburban, and urban settings – all of them saw students with no or limited internet connectivity. This meant, if you did not have internet, you could not learn – you could not access a free public education. Those families most greatly impacted were those without socio-economic means to afford expensive, high-speed internet and, by proxy, those who identify as Black and Latinx. This built even deeper racial and economic divides to education, advancement, and access throughout Maryland.

While this was immediately felt by those in the education sector as we scrambled to find hotspots, discounts, and talk to elected officials, we understand that it is far more reaching than just students accessing internet to learn. It is the elderly signing up for a COVID-19 vaccine, it is the sick accessing healthcare appointments, it is the way we can connect with others and check-in, it is the way we access news and information, it is a way to manage financially, it is how we can purchase things, and so much more. Internet connectivity is a basic right all Marylanders must have access.

We are in support to establishing the Office of Digital Inclusion in the Department of Housing and Community Development to ensure that every resident of Maryland is supported by high-quality broadband Internet service at an affordable price. It is necessary that every citizen has the tools necessary to use and take advantage of the Internet. To be able to keep up with the demands of our new and lasting reality, all Marylanders must have the ability to connect to reliable broadband Internet by December 31, 2029. We cannot leave anyone behind and grow the wealth, health, and race disparities even more.

If you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to reach out. I can be reached at the information below.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'McKenzie Allen', written in a cursive style.

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