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**HB97: Department of Housing and Community Development – Office of Digital Inclusion – Established
(Digital Connectivity Act of 2021)**

Sponsored by Delegates Lierman, Attar, Bridges, Henson, D. Jones, Rosenberg, and Smith

Assigned to: Economic Matters Committee

January 26, 2021

Position: Support

The Arc Maryland is the largest statewide advocacy organization dedicated to the rights and quality of life of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We are writing in support of HB 097.

The bill would establish the Office of Digital Inclusion in the Department of Housing and Community Development. The purpose of the Office is to ensure that **every** resident of the state is supported in the adoption of reliable, universal, high-quality broadband Internet service at an affordable price and has the tools necessary to use the Internet and its resources.

During the pandemic, remote supports have been critical for many families of children and adults with developmental disabilities. Adults with disabilities have received remote telehealth, participated in virtual meaningful day programming, and have used the internet as the only mechanism for connection with their families. Children with disabilities and their parents have relied on the Internet to access virtual learning, receive related services, and connect with their peers.

Research supports that many people with disabilities have low or very low income. Access to reliable, and affordable internet, for them, has been a barrier to the ability to access critical support and connection services. There are also areas of the state where people with disabilities live known as Internet “deserts.” In these areas, the struggle is greatest; individuals may have zero connection to virtual services or supports. If they are unable to drive, they cannot even access connectivity to wifi/internet service from a local coffee shop! The need is severe.

In conclusion, we fully support the creation of the Office of Digital Inclusion. We believe it will create opportunities for access and digital equity in our state.

Sincerely,

Ande Kolp

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