



Testimony HB 97
House Economic Matters
January 26, 2021
Position: FAVORABLE

Dear Chairman Davis & Members of the House Economic Matters Committee:

The Community Development Network of Maryland (CDN) is the voice for Maryland's community development sector and serves nearly 200 member organizations. CDN—focuses on small affordable housing developers, housing counseling agencies and community-based non-profits across the state of Maryland. The mission of CDN is to promote, strengthen and advocate for the community development sector throughout Maryland's urban, suburban and rural communities. CDN envisions a state in which all communities are thriving and where people of all incomes have abundant opportunities for themselves and their families.

HB 97 would establish 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 the tools to use the internet.

CDN will look to this office to: lead stakeholder engagement at the state and local level; collect reliable data on broadband deployment to effectively target funding; evaluate the impacts of grants and other activities; lead planning at the state and local to expand broadband availability in areas that lack it ; and secure and disseminate state and federal funds to expand broadband access.

In October 2020, CDN commissioned a report, "Disconnected in Maryland," by John Horrigan, Ph.D. The report found that more than half a million households in our state, nearly 1 in 4, do not have a home wireline broadband subscription. Two-thirds of those who are disconnected live in metro counties or Baltimore City. These households are disproportionately poor, African American and Hispanic. Of particular concern are children in poverty unable to access classroom instruction and older adults cut off from services of all kinds. Further, for workers of color, immigrant workers, and workers with limited formal education, digital access and skill gaps present immediate threats to their ability to sustain their families and make them less likely to reconnect to work once separated.

Individuals and communities need state policymakers to commit to creating digitally equitable systems in response to the Covid-19 crisis and beyond. Failing to act now will leave whole communities on the sidelines of the economy. As workers, training providers, and businesses scurry to keep essential services flowing, policymakers must return the favor by advancing and investing in the policy that will enable those essential workers to engage with the digital tools needed to thrive in our complex and fast-changing economy.

We respectfully request a favorable report for HB 97.

Submitted by Claudia Wilson Randall, Executive Director, Community Development Network

Maryland Digital Equity - Understanding the problem Information

Below is a link to articles about the Digital Divide

CDN commissioned “[Disconnected in Maryland.](#)” by John Horrigan a report released in January that defines the hundreds of thousands of Maryland households, from Baltimore City to rural communities the lack regular subscriptions to broadband internet service, making it difficult for those households to take part in the digital economy, attend virtual school or take advantage of online resources, s gap and offers recommendations on how to solve it.

CBS Sunday Morning – Outlines the Broadband Problem simply in 9 minute segment [The Great Broadband divide](#)

Pew Charitable Trust – [Key Elements Broadband Fact Sheet](#)

Here is [link to the forum](#) CDN held during Community Development Week October 2020.

Brookings Report – [Broadband Adoption is on the Rise but states can do much more](#)

[The Cost of Connectivity Infographic](#) – Open Technology Institute

[Baltimore's Digital Divide: Gaps in Internet Connectivity and the Impact on Low-income City Residents](#) by John Horrigan