



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 97

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

House Economic Matters Committee

January 26, 2021

Submitted by Stacey Jefferson and Julia Gross, Co-Chairs

Member Agencies:

Advocates for Children and Youth
Baltimore Jewish Council
Behavioral Health System Baltimore
CASH Campaign of Maryland
Catholic Charities
Episcopal Diocese of Maryland
Family League of Baltimore
Fuel Fund of Maryland
Health Care for the Homeless
Homeless Persons
Representation Project
Job Opportunities Task Force
League of Women Voters of Maryland
Loyola University Maryland
Maryland Catholic Conference
Maryland Center on Economic Policy
Maryland Community Action
Partnership
Maryland Family Network
Maryland Hunger Solutions
Paul's Place
Public Justice Center
St. Vincent de Paul of Baltimore
Welfare Advocates

Marylanders Against Poverty

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Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) strongly supports HB 97, which aims to address the current digital divide through the creation of a new Office of Digital Inclusions to focus on developing a strategic plan to expand affordable and reliable broadband internet access to all Maryland residents.

Within the past year, the COVID-19 pandemic has served to highlight and exacerbate a plethora of inequities and systemic issues that have long existed within our society. Among these issues, inequitable access to broadband internet has risen become a major stumbling block to hundreds of thousands of households in Maryland as critical services have transitioned into remote and virtual settings due to the pandemic.

Whether it be virtual classrooms, online grocery shopping, or telehealth sessions, individuals and families across the state rely on stable internet now more than ever to maintain a safe and healthy lifestyle. However, too many households have been found to lack both the tools and internet connectivity necessary for daily life, leaving them unable to work remotely, apply for safety net programs, or access critical information about the current public health crisis.

The recent report from the Abell Foundation report, "[Disconnected in Maryland](#)", shows that close to 290,000 Maryland households were found to lack the tools for connecting, such as desktops, tablets, or laptops. Additionally, approximately 108,000 Maryland households with children under the age of 18 do not have wireline internet service at home, leaving these children vulnerable to education and homework gaps. Although these inequities are found across the state, they disproportionately impact low-income communities as well as African American and Hispanic households.

As our society continues to progress farther into the digital age, we must ensure that all Maryland families have the tools and internet service needed to maintain a healthy and productive lifestyle during this pandemic and beyond.

MAP appreciates your consideration and urges the committee to issue a favorable report for HB 97.

Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) is a coalition of service providers, faith communities, and advocacy organizations advancing statewide public policies and programs necessary to alleviate the burdens faced by Marylanders living in or near poverty, and to address the underlying systemic causes of poverty.