



January 29, 2021

The Honorable Dereck E. Davis
Economic Matters Committee
Room 231, House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: **HB 0097** – Department of Housing and Community Development - Office of Digital Inclusion - Established (Digital Connectivity Act of 2021) – **Support**

Dear Delegate Davis:

HB 0097 seeks to establish an office of Digital Inclusion in the Department of Housing and Community Development to ensure that every resident of our state is supported by high-quality broadband internet service at an affordable price, and has the tools necessary to use and take advantage of the internet. One of the first tasks of this office will be to conduct an audit of the availability, reliability and affordability of broadband internet services in every county, and then to identify sources of funds that can be used to expand access to broadband internet and assisting local jurisdictions to apply for and receive funds to expanding access to broadband internet.

Recent data from the Abell Foundation shows that over 520,000 Marylander's do not subscribe to wired broadband services at their home. That is 23% of the population.

- 108,000 of these are households with children under the age of 18, creating an additional “homework” or learning gap. This is especially worrisome in the time of COVID.
- These households are disproportionately poor, African-American and Hispanic. In fact, nearly 40% of all disconnected households are African-American. (206,000) (*Abell Foundation “Disconnected in Maryland” report, Jan 2021*)

This disparity further creates disadvantages for learning (both k-12 and higher education), health care and tele-med services, health information, workforce development and access to employment opportunities.

Furthermore, with the necessity of local and small businesses to increase their presence online, the lack of adequate and affordable internet prevents 23% of our population from engaging in the online marketplace – not to mention the ability of those businesses to offer their services online. This situation removes those people as potential customers and prevents those businesses from expanding their customer base.

Therefore, the Carroll County Chamber of Commerce, a business advocacy organization of over 600 members, supports this bill. We therefore request that you give it a favorable report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Mike McMullin'.

Carroll County Chamber of Commerce • 9 East Main Street • Westminster, MD 21157
Phone: 410-848-9050 • Fax: 410-876-1023 • www.carrollcountychamber.org



Mike McMullin
President
Carroll County Chamber of Commerce

CC: Delegate Haven Shoemaker
Senator Justin Ready