

**CITY OF BALTIMORE
COUNCIL BILL 20-0229R
(Resolution)**

Introduced by: President Scott, Councilmembers Clarke, Henry, Bullock, Cohen, Middleton,
Sneed, Pinkett, Stokes, Burnett, Reisinger, Dorsey, Costello, McCray, Schleifer
Introduced and adopted: May 18, 2020

A COUNCIL RESOLUTION CONCERNING

Acceleration of Expanded Broadband Availability for Our Students

FOR the purpose of calling on all wired and wireless internet service providers, nonprofit organizations, the business community, the Baltimore City Public Schools, and the City of Baltimore to accelerate expanded broadband availability programs to students in Baltimore City to support online distance learning during the COVID-19 public health emergency.

Recitals

WHEREAS, In an effort to control and prevent the spread of COVID-19, on March 5, 2020 and renewed on May 6, 2020, a state of emergency and catastrophic health emergency was declared in the State of Maryland under Title 14 of the State Public Safety Article.

WHEREAS, Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, public and private schools are closed. Many students are relying on internet distance learning to continue their studies; however this solution assumes that students have access to technology to support online distance learning. We know that many do not. In fact, according to the United States Census Bureau, approximately 30% of Baltimore households are not connected to internet service in the home. This lack of access to technology to support online distance learning falls disproportionately on homes and families of color.

WHEREAS, This Council recognizes the efforts of internet service providers in Baltimore to meet the challenges of broadband adoption especially during the COVID-19 public health emergency. For example, providers are offering two-month free and low-cost broadband service to qualifying low-income residents, providing more wireless hotspots, offering discounted basic broadband service to minimize bad debt, offering bill deferment programs, avoiding disconnect and late fees, removing data limits, and providing discounted computers and free digital literacy training during the declared Maryland State of Emergency for COVID-19. It clear, however, that we must do more.

WHEREAS, Section 1 of Article VIII of the Maryland Constitution requires that the General Assembly provide for a “thorough and efficient” system of free public schools.

EXPLANATION: Underlining indicates matter added by amendment.
~~Strike out~~ indicates matter deleted by amendment.

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1 **WHEREAS**, The courts have interpreted this clause to ensure the right to public education is
2 measured by “contemporary” standards in order “to equip a child for his [or her] role as a citizen
3 and as a competitor in the labor market.” *Hornbeck v. Somerset Cty. Bd. of Educ.*, 295 Md. 597,
4 638 (1983).

5 **WHEREAS**, While this constitutional duty is undoubtedly on the State, the Council believes
6 that continued public-private partnership is necessary to ensure the constancy of this right,
7 especially in times of online distance learning due to a public health emergency. At this point,
8 the phrase “we are all in this together” is cliché, but it holds absolutely true when we talk about
9 the education of our children. We are all in this together; let’s prove it.

10 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE**, That the
11 Council calls on all wired and wireless internet service providers, nonprofit organizations, the
12 business community the Baltimore City Public Schools, and the City of Baltimore to accelerate
13 expanded broadband availability programs to students in Baltimore City to support online
14 distance learning during the COVID-19 public health emergency.

15 **AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, That the Council calls on all wired and wireless internet
16 service providers to promote available broadband service programs by conducting outreach to
17 students, including direct community outreach, social media, and mailings directly to households
18 with children enrolled in K-12 Baltimore schools who currently do not have broadband in the
19 home.

20 **AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, That the Council calls on the State of Maryland and
21 Governor Hogan to apply to the Department of Education for grants under the Elementary and
22 Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund and the Governor’s Emergency Education Relief Fund
23 to help fund distant learning, including internet connectivity, laptops, and tablets for students
24 enrolled in K-12 Baltimore schools that currently do not have broadband in their homes.

25 **AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Governor,
26 Mayor, the State Superintendent of Schools, the CEO of the Baltimore City Public School
27 System, the local government relations staff for Comcast Xfinity, the local government relations
28 staff for Verizon Maryland, the General Manager of Port Networks, Inc., the Cable
29 Telecommunications Association of Maryland, Delaware, and D.C., and the Mayor’s Legislative
30 Liaison to the City Council.