

FROM	NAME & TITLE	Laura Larsen, Budget Director 	CITY of BALTIMORE MEMO	
	AGENCY NAME & ADDRESS	Bureau of the Budget and Management Research Room 469, City Hall		
	SUBJECT	City Council Bill 23-0172R – Informational Hearing – Baltimore City Broadband and Digital Equity		

DATE:

TO

The Honorable President and
Members of the City Council
City Hall, Room 400

November 27, 2023

The Department of Finance is herein reporting on City Council Bill 23-0172R, Informational Hearing – Baltimore City Broadband and Digital Equity, the purpose of which is for the Office of Broadband and Digital Equity and other relevant City agencies to provide the City Council with updates on the City’s progress to close the digital divide by 2030. This hearing is also intended to inform the City Council on the City’s powers and limitations regarding broadband expansion and existing contracts and franchises. This report outlines the work of the Office of Broadband and Digital Equity and the City’s franchise agreements.

Broadband and Digital Equity

The Baltimore City Office of Broadband and Digital Equity (BDE) was established in 2020 to better coordinate the City’s efforts at closing the digital divide through development and implementation of the Digital Equity Framework. The City’s Digital Equity Framework seeks to achieve four goals: providing City residents with access to affordable and reliable high-speed internet (beginning with the most underserved communities); providing access to digital skills training and education; ensuring residents can acquire modern computing devices; and ensuring that residents have access to technical support, in multiple languages, for digital devices.

In Fiscal 2022, BDE was established as its own service in the Mayor’s Office to increase transparency around this work. In Fiscal 2024, BDE was transferred to Baltimore City Office of Information and Technology (BCIT) to allow BDE to better utilize BCIT’s existing resources and staff support, as well as align with ongoing BCIT projects. This team is now presented as a service within BCIT’s overall budget.

The Fiscal 2024 Adopted Budget for BDE is \$17.6 million. The full budget is funded through Federal, State, and Special grants. Within the grant budget, \$7.6 million is from ongoing grant awards the remaining \$10.0 million is from potential grants that may be received during Fiscal 2024.

This service has also received \$35.0 million in ARPA funding, this amount is on top of grant amounts included in the Fiscal 2024 budget. The table below summarizes how ARPA funds for BDE are allocated by project:

Project	Award Amount
Broadband Phase I	\$ 6,000,000
Broadband Phase II	\$ 24,600,000
Enoch Pratt Free Library	\$ 4,400,000
Total	\$ 35,000,000

Broadband Phase I includes salary and benefits for 14 positions in Fiscal 2023 and Fiscal 2024; extending City fiber to 23 recreation centers; utilizing consulting services related to broadband implementation; and creating marketing materials to inform the public of BDE's efforts. Broadband Phase II includes 14 positions for Fiscal 2025 through Fiscal 2027; expanding outreach and marketing efforts; expanding broadband access and infrastructure; and ongoing funding for the Digital Equity Fund. Enoch Pratt Free Library supports efforts to advance digital equity through the Pratt Anywhere program, which pairs digital equipment with skill development opportunities; funds technical support positions; redesigns visitor computer banks; and enhancing resident access to free Wi-Fi at outdoor spaces.

Following the adoption of the Fiscal 2024 budget, BCIT sought approval of two General Fund positions for this service: HR Generalist II and IT Division Manager. The annualized cost for these positions is approximately \$237,000 (based on 2024 salary and benefit rates). These costs were absorbed by recurring reductions elsewhere in BCIT's General Fund budget.

The Department of Finance will attend the hearing for this Resolution and respond to any fiscal inquiries.

cc: Michael Moiseyev
Nina Themelis