Legislation Details (With Text)

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Title: Closing the Digital Divide During the COVID-19 Crisis
For the purpose of calling on the Baltimore City Government, the State of Maryland, and the Baltimore City Public School System to work together to make sure every student has access to technology to support online learning during the COVID-19 crisis and to support the short and long term employment needs of participants in Baltimore's YouthWorks program.

Sponsors: Zeke Cohen, Bill Henry, Sharon Green Middleton, Kristerfer Burnett, John T. Bullock, Leon F. Pinkett, III, Danielle McCray, Mary Pat Clarke, Shannon Sneed, Robert Stokes, Sr., Ryan Dorsey

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Attachments: 1. 20-0211R~1st Reader

Date	Ver.	Action By	Action	Result
4/13/2020	0	City Council	Adopted	
4/13/2020	0	City Council	Introduced	

* Warning: This is an unofficial, introductory copy of the bill.
The official copy considered by the City Council is the first reader copy.

Introductory*

City of Baltimore
Council Bill   R
(Resolution)

Introduced by: Councilmember Cohen

A Resolution Entitled

A Council Resolution concerning
Closing the Digital Divide During the COVID-19 Crisis
For the purpose of calling on the Baltimore City Government, the State of Maryland, and the Baltimore City
    Public School System to work together to make sure every student has access to technology to support
    online learning during the COVID-19 crisis and to support the short and long term employment needs of
    participants in Baltimore's YouthWorks program.

Recitals

Whereas, Technology and online learning tools are vitally important for the education and future
employment of Baltimore's children, yet access to technology is deeply inequitably distributed across lines of
race and class;

Whereas, Baltimore trails behind many cities when it comes to the number of households with home
internet connections, with the 2013 American Community Survey by the U.S. Census Bureau ranking

Baltimore 261 out of 296 cities surveyed. National research indicates that lower-income and racial minority households are disproportionately disconnected from the internet;

Whereas, According to the U.S. Census, approximately 30% of households in Baltimore have no internet access. Low-income communities and communities of color in Baltimore, in particular, lack access to adequate hardware, such as desktops, laptops, and electronic tablets;

Whereas, Regular access to devices at libraries and public schools is unavailable during this period of COVID-19 closures, removing the ability for individuals and families to access established systems of support to meet needs relating to education, employment, and social connectedness;

Whereas, More than 14,000 Baltimore youth between the ages of 14 and 21 applied for jobs through YouthWorks for the summer of 2020. Children in Baltimore rely on these summer jobs for work experience and a vital source of income for themselves and their families. This year Youthworks may be forced to convert to "telework" to promote the safety and technological skills of our youth;

Whereas, Starting on March 16, 2020, all Baltimore City Public Schools closed at the direction of the Maryland State Department of Education and in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Whereas, On April 6, 2020, Baltimore City Public Schools began distance learning for all students with educational content broadcast on the City's cable television access channels and posted online to the City schools website. Teachers began engaging students on a variety of online platforms to give live instruction and host class assignments and resources;

Whereas, On April 8, 2020, State Superintendent of Schools Karen B. Salmon indicated the possibility that public schools might remain closed into the 2020-2021 academic year.

Whereas, According to the MIT Task Force on the Work of the Future, providing students with online learning and teleworking capacities is critical to the future global economy. This need is further accelerated by COVID-19, particularly in areas like Baltimore that are most hamstrung by the digital divide;

Whereas, Parents, educators, students and community have all called on City leadership to address this immediate and pressing need. Organizations such as the Parent Community Advisory Board, the Baltimore Teachers Union, the Teacher Democracy Project, Baltimoreans for Educational Equity, and many other groups have expressed the need for immediate increased access to online learning.

Now, therefore, be it resolved by the City Council of Baltimore, That the City Council calls on the Baltimore City Government, the Baltimore City Public School System and the State of Maryland, to work together to make sure every student has access to technology to support online learning during the COVID-19 crisis and to support the short and long term employment needs of participants in Baltimore's YouthWorks program. This may include the one-time purchase of digital learning devices such as laptops or chrome books and the expansion of internet access to include all families in Baltimore City Public Schools.

And be it further resolved, That the Council calls for the reimbursement of monies spent on closing the digital divide to be reimbursed by the Federal Government.

And be it further resolved, That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Governor, the Mayor, the State Superintendent of Schools, the CEO of Baltimore City Public Schools, the Director of the Office of Employment Development, the Director of the Office of Children and Family Success, the Director of the Office of Immigrant Affairs, and the Mayor's Legislative Liaison to the City Council.