January 25, 2021

Ms. Marlene H. Dortch
Secretary, Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

Re: EMERGENCY BROADBAND CONNECTIVITY FUND ASSISTANCE
WC Docket No. 20-445

Dear Ms. Dortch:

The Baltimore Digital Equity Coalition (BDEC) connects committed organizations and individuals to coordinated efforts to advance digital equity and close the digital divide. A cohort of over 50 member organizations, BDEC works to address both the urgent and long-term need for increased digital access throughout the city of Baltimore. Initially formed as a "rapid response" effort in the wake of COVID-19 closures and shutdowns, the Coalition acknowledges the deep-rooted and systemic history of digital inequity and aims to close the digital divide in Baltimore by providing:

- Access to Devices – Ensuring affordable, available, and sufficient devices for all historically underrepresented residents, small businesses, and community organizations.
- Greater Internet Connectivity – Ensuring there are sufficient options for affordable and available internet connectivity for all.
- Digital Skills Training and Technical Support – Creating and delivering educational opportunities for all residents and ensuring technical support is available to all who need it.
- Advocacy – Engaging elected officials, civic leaders, and citizens most affected by the digital divide to advocate for equal access to computers, internet connectivity, and digital literacy.

As a new, but growing coalition, we are hopeful about the ways in which we have been able to serve the city thus far. However, to achieve the long-term impact we seek--the full social and economic inclusion of all Baltimore residents--we must have affordable, reliable, and high-speed broadband.

A new analysis of the American Community Survey (ACS) data shows that large numbers of Baltimore City households lack two essential tools for getting online: wireline broadband service at home and computer access. In 2018, 96,000 households, or 40.7 percent of households, did not have wireline internet services, such as cable, fiber, or digital subscriber line service. Additionally, approximately 75,000 households, or one

in three, did not have either a desktop or laptop computer. Of households with children under the age of 17, 19,200 did not have wireline broadband, and 15,000 households with children did not have desktop or laptop computers at home. Baltimore also fares poorly compared to other cities, ranking 29th out of 33 cities examined for home wireline broadband adoption.

According to the ACS report, there are deep digital access disparities based on race, income, and education level. While 73.3 percent of white households have wireline broadband, only 50.2 percent of African American households and 46.6 percent of Hispanic (sic) households have wireline broadband. For desktop or laptop computers, 80.7 percent of white households have these devices, while only 60 percent of African American and 47.5 percent of Hispanic (sic) households have them. Concerning income, just 33.8 percent of low-income Baltimore households with incomes below $25,000 have home wireline service, compared with 83 percent for households with annual incomes above $75,000.[1]

As the FCC considers the guidelines for the Broadband Connectivity Fund, we ask that you center the needs of Baltimore's families, no matter their citizenship status, criminal record, or zip code. *To ensure the most vulnerable of residents can successfully access this vital resource, the FCC must:*

- Ensure that providers of all sizes--not just the incumbents--be included in the program;
- Conduct targeted media outreach--especially to ethnic media--to ensure that low-income households are aware of their eligibility for the Emergency Broadband Benefit and hear about it through trusted messengers via broadcast and print media;
- Design and make available digital materials that community-based organizations can easily print, post, and distribute; keeping in mind the need for language accessibility and literacy levels;
- Host Town Halls in "majority minority communities" (sic), so that community anchor institutions, civic leaders, and local and state officials learn about the ways to support and/or promote participation in the program;
- Elevate trusted community institutions as champions of this vital program, recognizing places of worship, HBCUs, neighborhood associations, and nonprofits as leaders in connectivity, driven by public interest values instead of profit margins; and
- Work with Universal Service Administrative Company and participating providers to ensure that Lifeline subscribers know that they are also eligible for the Emergency Broadband Benefit.

Sincerely,

PCs for People
Digital Harbor Foundation
Code in the Schools
Community Development Network of Maryland
Project Waves
Baltimore Workforce Funders Collaborative
Art with a Heart

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[1]Abell Foundation. "Baltimore's Digital Divide: Gaps in Internet Connectivity and the Impact on Low-Income Residents." Updated May 2020.
https://abell.org/publications/baltimores-digital-divide-gaps-internet-connectivity-and-impact-low-income-city

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