

BILL: House Bill 975
TITLE: Education - Digital Equity for All Maryland Students Act of 2017
POSITION: SUPPORT
DATE: February 28, 2017
COMMITTEE: Ways and Means Committee
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The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) supports House Bill 975.

This bill would establish the School Broadband Upgrade Grant Program and a \$9 million fund to leverage federal funds that are available through the federal E-Rate program to install or upgrade Internet access in every public school in the State. MABE supports the strategy proposed by this bill to establish a state fund to leverage already available federal funding to significantly increase investments in meeting the educational technology needs of Maryland's public schools statewide.

MABE strongly supports local board and school system administration discretion to adopt policies and pursue initiatives based on local priorities and the availability of financial resources. This bill preserves such local discretion, while at the same time providing a substantial incentive to build local partnerships to combine local, state and federal funding to improve the teaching and learning conditions for students. In the workplace, many Marylanders take connectivity for granted. Our students deserve the same access to learning technology in order to fully prepare them for success in the college and career environments of today and tomorrow.

The Schools and Libraries Program of the Universal Service Fund, commonly known as the E-Rate program, provides discounted telecommunications services and Internet access to eligible U.S. schools and libraries. The E-Rate program helps high-need schools and libraries obtain services including: Telecommunications and Internet access (called Priority 1 services); and Internal connections and basic maintenance (called Priority 2 services). Discounts range from 20 to 90 percent, and the specific amount of the discount depends on: poverty level (based on the percentage of students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch); and location of the school or library receiving service (rural or urban). Funding for E-Rate discounts comes from telecommunications carriers, including landline, wireless, and Interconnected Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP).

Maryland's school systems have participated for many years in the E-Rate program and look forward to the continued investments which would be made possible through the program and enhanced state funding called for in this legislation.

For these reasons, MABE requests a favorable report on House Bill 975.