

BILL: Senate Bill 770
TITLE: Education - Technology Resources - Funding
(Ending the Digital Divide Act)
DATE: March 9, 2021
POSITION: OPPOSE
COMMITTEE: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs
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The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE), representing all of the State's local boards of education, opposes Senate Bill 770.

While MABE appreciates the overarching goal and objective to achieve equitable access of each student to high quality digital learning resources. MABE is supporting pending State legislation and advocating for federal funding and policy changes to close the “homework gap” and ensure long-term improvements in educational technology resources for all students. However, MABE is opposing this legislation because it would divert a significant amount of per pupil funding for such technology in a manner that would detrimentally impact the per pupil funding allocations to be provided under the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future Act.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted a long-documented and persistent inequity affecting students that lack adequate broadband access. Widespread home-based learning has highlighted a long-documented and persistent inequity of students that lack adequate broadband access. This digital divide, commonly known as the homework gap, impacts millions of students across the nations, and families and students in each of Maryland’s 24 local jurisdictions and school systems.

The homework gap also impacts some of the most vulnerable students such as those with disabilities and English learners. As the instructional environment for students has shifted from traditional classrooms in school buildings to virtual classrooms, the necessity for each student to have high-quality access to the Internet is imperative. With the current crisis dramatically shifting our children’s education to remote and online learning, it has never been more important to address this inequity. However, the homework gap must not be allowed to persist once students return to in-person learning. Broadband access in homes of all students is essential to supporting student learning and enrichment when they are not in school.

In 2021, MABE is supporting Senate Bill 66, legislation essential to Maryland’s efforts to improve necessary high-speed broadband required for twenty-first century learning both when students are school and when they are home. Maryland’s local boards of education are also urging the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and Congress to focus on ways to improve the overall connectivity and digital infrastructure for all students and abandon efforts to make connectivity more difficult. Closing the homework gap is a pressing national need that must also be addressed through reforms to federal laws and regulations so that all students have equitable access to Maryland’s world class public education system.

For these reasons, MABE requests an unfavorable report on Senate Bill 770.