



BRANDON M. SCOTT  
MAYOR

*100 Holliday Street, Room 250  
Baltimore, Maryland 21202*

April 22, 2022

To President Shanaysha Sauls and Chair Matthew Gallagher:

I am genuinely grateful for the Baltimore Community Foundation's continued commitment to, and support of solutions intended to address Baltimore's most intractable challenges. The Digital Divide is another construct of the same insidious forces of structural racism and systemic inequality that have resulted in generations of disinvestment and institutional neglect throughout our city. Deconstructing and rebuilding these flawed systems are a cornerstone of my Administration. Although we know that there are no simple or easy answers to these complex problems, we are committed to attacking root causes, regardless of difficulty. The Digital Equity Framework created by the Mayor's Office of Broadband & Digital Equity (MOBDE) lays out our vision for how the City will approach long-term and sustainable solutions to close the Digital Divide by 2030 permanently. It will require thoughtful collaboration and deliberate partnership with all stakeholders to achieve that goal. It is not the last word but rather the first one as we define our desired outcomes.

One guiding principle of the framework recognizes that access has become fundamental to every Baltimorean's full participation in modern society and our increasingly digital economy's opportunities. We should not expect market forces alone to provide equitable access, and we cannot rely on subsidies as long-term solutions. Instead, we will address this critical need in the same manner that cities deliver other essential services, such as clean drinking water and well-maintained roads. The notion of a municipal network may be relatively new for a large city, but other cities, including New York, Los Angeles, and Detroit, are actively considering similar plans. This is an idea whose time has come and for good reason.

Our initial focus is to invest in our existing digital infrastructure, starting in our most underserved neighborhoods. My administration's commitment of \$35MM in ARPA funding will enable us to begin building this critical service for those who need it the most. At the same time, we are developing our approach to the longer-term vision of a comprehensive, citywide deployment. Since my announcement, we have designed and begun to procure the equipment that will enable us to build our public access network to deliver internet service. We have begun the detailed planning and engineering to deploy public wi-fi throughout underserved neighborhoods, starting in West Baltimore. The first locations will go live this summer. We are also partnering with the Housing Authority of Baltimore City (HABC) to bring fiber-optic internet service to public housing residents to go live at the first development this fall.

Any undertaking of this magnitude requires laying a solid foundation to ensure the desired outcome. I remain focused on action and delivering real change for the residents of Baltimore. Making lasting structural change, with an eye towards equity, takes detailed planning and preparation before tangible results show. To date, our public announcements may seem modest in scope, but they are simply the first steps in a comprehensive and bold approach, a down payment, if you will, to begin to close the Digital Divide in Baltimore. We have hired the first dedicated Project Manager and are currently developing detailed project plans for the full scope of Baltimore's ARPA investment. You will also be happy to know that the MOBDE has an active posting to hire their next team member and expects to post 3 to 4 more in the weeks.

Developing a robust and sustainable financial and governance model led by the MOBDE is a top priority. Indeed, I expect that we will work together with our philanthropic community, anchor institutions, the private sector, and our local, state, and federal government partners to bring all available knowledge and resources to the table as we craft the necessary strategies to accomplish this critical goal. We are currently engaged in extensive conversations with our government partners at the state and federal levels about funding available to support Baltimore's ambitious infrastructure and digital equity initiatives. We intend to take full advantage of any and all applicable funding opportunities. While we continue to work to finalize sustainable funding sources, our initial focus is laying the groundwork for the broader initiative. And we are starting with our most underserved communities, where we have a clear mandate and identified funding streams.

The Digital Equity Framework is intended to be a living document and will be updated as we develop additional clarity and actionable strategies in partnership with stakeholders and community input. As you can see, we are growing MOBDE's capacity. We will begin to provide detailed and regular updates on our efforts and progress, keeping with my commitment to transparency and data-driven government.

Every day that we don't work to close the Digital Divide in Baltimore, our most vulnerable residents fall farther and farther behind. We cannot have inaction for fear that we haven't gone big enough. This approach will enable us to address the challenge block by block and community by community for those with the greatest need. At the same time, we develop and refine our scaling goals for the entire City and long-term sustainability. Any sincere effort must begin with a clear focus on equity. I believe that this is the right approach for Baltimore to get us to the desired outcome, and I welcome your active participation.

In service,



Mayor Brandon M. Scott