

May 22, 2020

Dear Comcast Representatives,

The COVID-19 pandemic exposes and exacerbates pre-existing digital inequities across the US that fall along lines of race, class, and immigration status. Students need quality internet-access in order to do their assignments. However, according to the National Digital Inclusion Alliance, 22% of Baltimore households do not have internet of any type. When mobile plans are excluded, that number rises to 40.7%. To help get all students online in Baltimore, our individual schools have given up thousands of their own devices, the school district purchased 12,200 devices and our City Hall committed \$3M dollars in funds. We recognize that Comcast has been providing our students with low-cost internet city-wide and increasing access to more families, but we believe this crisis demands more of all of us.

We urge Comcast to: 1) Permanently increase the Internet Essentials download speed to 100Mbps and upload speed to 25 Mbps; 2) Extend the free Internet Essentials offer for students and families until 60 days after the complete reopening of public schools; and 3) Make all Xfinity hotspots free to the public for 60 days after the full restoration of school.

First, we ask that Comcast permanently increase Internet Essentials' upload speeds from 3 Mbps to 25 Mbps and download speeds from 25 Mbps to 100 Mbps. The speeds that are advertised are achievable under optimal conditions; yet, we know that many Baltimore households do not meet them. For example, they have copper infrastructure, not faster fiber optic. Many families also have older routers and devices that slow down their speeds. On top of these obstacles, the upload recommendation for the most common video conference applications (such as Zoom, Google Meet, and Blackboard Collaborate) is 1 to 2 Mbps. This is needed in addition to the bandwidth to run other standard programs and websites. With 3 Mbps of advertised upload speeds, most households are only able to participate in one video conference. At a time when many family members are home and most communications are digital, faster upload speeds are essential.

Users also need faster download speeds for getting large school project files & documents for work, watching films for courses, and playing assigned educational games. Yet, with only 25 Mbps, their experience will be slow or stagnant. In addition, spotty internet connection is frustrating for the average person, but it can obstruct the success of those with learning disabilities.

Given that Xfinity's 100 Mbps package advertises *"speed good for up to 5 devices at the same time,"* at best, 25 Mbps barely provides sufficient internet for 1 to 2 devices at a time. Therefore, it is necessary that Comcast provide Baltimore with a fast and reliable connection for homes with multiple people.

Second, we request that free Internet Essentials be extended from the time of enrollment until 60 days after public schools have fully reopened. It is important for Comcast to provide the people of Baltimore with a fast and reliable internet plan during this challenging time. Our families need time to save money after this unprecedented period of job loss.

Finally, it is crucial that all Xfinity hotspots, including those from leased Comcast modems, be free to the public starting now until 60 days after the full restoration of school. Xfinity hotspots have been extremely helpful when families cannot afford or were ineligible for an Internet Essentials plan. With the inclusion of free hotspots, there will be an increase of student productivity and a more positive feeling about your company.

Baltimore City's young people are being denied their human right to learn and work. The crisis in education began long before COVID-19 and we must keep the gap from widening. We must act together to ensure all students have the requisite tools, resources, and support for immediate and long term success.

Sincerely,

Kimberly, Samreen, Aliyah, Yashira, & Juan of Students Organizing a Multicultural & Open Society (SOMOS)

Organizational Sign-Ons:

1. Abell and Charles Village Mutual Aid
2. A Few Good Men
3. Adoptions Together
4. Advocates for Children and Youth
5. Adult Learning Center of Strong City Baltimore
6. Ana María Schwartz Caballero, Presidenta de Latino/Hispanic Faculty Association de UMBC
7. Artesanas Mexicanas
8. Arts Education in Maryland Schools (AEMS)
9. Baltimore City College Photography Club
10. Baltimore City Green Party
11. Baltimore City College Tech Knights
12. Baltimore Curriculum Project
13. Baltimore English-Spanish Intercambio
14. Baltimoreans for Educational Equity (BEE)
15. Baltimore Furniture Bank
16. BALTIMORE Palestine Solidarity
17. Better Waverly Mutual Aid
18. Black Yield Institute
19. BmoreSTEM
20. BOND - Building Our Nation's Daughters, Inc.
21. Brown Memorial Presbyterian Church
22. Byte Back
23. Casa Baltimore Limay, Inc.
24. CASA de Maryland
25. Chez Moi - Baltimore City College French Club
26. Coalition for a Humane Hopkins
27. Colombia Community Care
28. Comité Latino
29. Comité Mexicano de Sagrado Corazón
30. Community Development Network of MD
31. Communities United
32. Cool & Associates LLC/Veronica Cool
33. Cordova Economic Development Corporation
34. Council President Brandon Scott
35. Creative Alliance
36. David W. Hornbeck, former Superintendent of Maryland Public Schools and former Superintendent of Philadelphia Public Schools
37. Digital Harbor Foundation
38. Disability Rights Maryland
39. Facepaint by Marina
40. Fair Development RoundTable
41. Free Press
42. Friends of Latin America
43. Greater Baltimore Democratic Socialists of America steering committee
44. Greater Baltimore Urban League
45. Great Shoals Cellars
46. Great Shoals Winery
47. Hampstead Hill Academy PS #047

48. Hinenu: The Baltimore Justice Shtiebl
49. Hinkey-Benson Family Fund
50. HostHome Inc.
51. J DeSantis Art
52. Johns Hopkins Centro Sol
53. Klara Annibal (NAACP baltimore city)
54. Latinas in Baltimore
55. Latino Education Advancement Fund (LEAF)
56. LET'S GO Boys and Girls
57. Libraries Without Borders
58. Los Ingenieros de Poly
59. Loyola University Center for Community Service and Justice
60. Maryland Coalition for Community Schools (MD4CS)
61. Movement Alliance Project (formerly Media Mobilizing Project)
62. Malaya Baltimore
63. Marylanders for Educational and Environmental Change
64. Maryland Green Party
65. Maryland Out of School Time Network (MOST Network)
66. MediaJustice
67. Mera Kitchen Collective
68. Mexi Art by Ale
69. Montgomery County Democratic Socialists of America
70. NPower
71. Nuestras Raíces
72. Pan y Rosas
73. Peoples Power Assembly
74. Progressive Maryland
75. Project Own
76. Project Waves
77. Robert W Deutsch Foundation
78. Roots & Raices
79. Sam Home Service LLC
80. Sanctuary Streets Baltimore
81. SDMV Food Justice Campaign
82. Showing Up For Racial Justice Baltimore
83. Slowdown Productions
84. State Delegate Stephanie Smith
85. St. Michaels Distillery
86. STEM Center of Excellence, Inc
87. Stemnastics LLC.
88. Strong Schools Maryland
89. South Baltimore Learning Center
90. Sunrise Movement Baltimore
91. Suyana Technology Inc.
92. Teachers' Democracy Project
93. Teach For America Baltimore
94. Texas Rising RGV
95. The Baltimore Alliance of the Maryland Alliance of Public Charter Schools
96. The Baltimore Bern Unit
97. The Baltimore Intersection
98. The Baltimore Movement Of Rank and file Educators (BMORE)

- 99. The Baltimore Teachers Union
- 100. The Midtown Academy
- 101. The Parents' Place of MD
- 102. Thread Coffee Roasters
- 103. UJIMA PEOPLE'S PROGRESS PARTY MARYLAND
- 104. Unidos DMV
- 105. Wolfe Street Academy #23
- 106. World Beyond War - Baltimore Chapter
- 107. Writers in Baltimore Schools
- 108. 1st District Councilman Zeke Cohen
- 109. 13th District Councilwoman Shannon Sneed
- 110. 901 Arts
- 111. 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East