

**Testimony on Behalf of the County Executive Marc Elrich
on Bill 4-23, Administration – Non-Merit Positions – Special Projects Manager**

February 14, 2023

My name is Rich Madaleno, Chief Administrative Officer for Montgomery County Government. Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on behalf of County Executive Elrich in support of Bill 4-23 to create a second non-merit Special Projects Manager position in the County Executive Office.

Across the Nation, counties and cities are elevating their focus on digital equity and inclusion. In 2021, Congress passed a bipartisan infrastructure law that included major new investments for states via the Digital Equity Act. As this powerful \$2.75 billion legislation is implemented, state and local leaders are preparing for a “once-in-a-generation opportunity.”

The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) is expected to release state formula funding in Fall 2023. A total of \$1.44 billion over 5 years is available for State Digital Equity Capacity Grants. Another \$1.25 billion over 5 years will be available for Digital Equity Competitive Grants. NTIA has not announced a specific timeline for these grants - that the County would be eligible for, in addition to funding passing through the State Digital Equity Capacity Grants.

The Moore Administration is preparing to take advantage of this opportunity that is key to removing barriers that keep people out of the job market, quality healthcare, and a great education. The State will draft a Digital Equity Plan with measurable goals and objectives that will be tied to the Maryland’s economic and workforce development goals and outcomes. Governor Moore has said he wants Maryland to be the most connected in the nation – and Montgomery County is the largest County in the State. In the past two years, Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Howard County have launched expanded digital equity initiatives.

The new Special Projects Manager position will be Montgomery County’s primary representative for coordination with internal and external stakeholders, focused on digital equity and broadband connectivity issues, to expand public access for County residents.

This position is needed in the Office of the County Executive to:

- Develop a comprehensive strategy with metrics for expanding equitable and affordable Internet access, including public/private partnerships.
- Partner with all stakeholders, including Federal, State and County government officials, anchor institutions, philanthropic organizations, Montgomery County Public Schools, and private enterprises.
- Work with the County administration and County Council to implement policies, programs, and regulations necessary to achieve our Digital Equity goals.

There are many reasons to establish this position, and not wait until July 1, not the least of which is the opportunity to partner with the Biden and Moore Administrations at this critical juncture on this critical effort.

I look forward to your support for establishing a position to lead our campaign to advance digital equity and close the digital divide in Montgomery County.