Dear Mayor Young, Council President Scott, and Chairman Cohen,

The COVID-19 pandemic exposes and exacerbates pre-existing inequities in Baltimore City that fall along lines of race and class. In this unprecedented time of social isolation, youth access to technology is vitally important for continued connection to educational curriculum, job opportunities, and relationships with loved ones.

We call on the Baltimore city government to provide the necessary emergency funding to equip our young people with the tools they need to navigate long-distance long-term learning, participate in Baltimore's YouthWorks program, and maintain social and emotional connections to their loved ones.

While other Maryland counties have already purchased and distributed technology to a significant portion of their families, tens of thousands of young people in Baltimore lack laptops and internet at home. The 2013 American Community Survey by the U.S. Census Bureau ranked Baltimore 261 out of 296 cities surveyed when it comes to households with internet connections. Disaggregated data shows that lower-income and racial minority households are disproportionately disconnected from the internet and lack desktops, laptops, and electronic tablets at home.

We applaud City Schools for the work they are doing to supply families with the tools they need. At the same time, we also acknowledge that due to historical underfunding, the needs of our young people outstrip City School's capacity. Additionally, even when a household has a device and internet access, that device is often being shared between multiple students and an adult's own job requirements. This places everyone in a position where they cannot do their best learning and work, which only further widens academic and economic gaps.

Furthermore, more than 14,000 Baltimore youth between the ages of 14 and 21 applied for jobs through YouthWorks for the summer of 2020. Children in Baltimore rely on these summer jobs for work experience and a vital source of income for themselves and their families. There is already a backlog of orders for technology during this global pandemic, and the longer we wait the longer the turnaround time to get young people the necessary tools to engage in learning and work.

Parents, educators, students and community leaders urgently call on city leadership to address this immediate pressing need. The undersigned organizations and groups **call on the Baltimore City Government to make an emergency financial investment into the acquisition of additional technology and cost-effective mechanisms to increase internet connectivity in support of the education of children and families and the employment needs of participants in Baltimore's YouthWorks program.**

We ask that Baltimore City Council set a precedent by investing in greater internet connectivity, access to devices, digital skills training, and technological support necessary to close the digital divide. We believe these to be essential solutions to eradicate long-standing racial and economic barriers to education and employment. Additionally, we ask that funds be reimbursed to the extent possible by the state or federal government.

Baltimore City's young people are being denied their human rights to learn and work. The crisis in education began long before COVID-19. We must keep the gap from widening. We must act to equip them with the requisite tools, resources, and support for immediate and long term success.

Sincerely,

Diamonté Brown, President, Baltimore Teachers Union

Organizational Sign-ons:

Act Now Baltimore
Adoptions Together
The Adult Learning Center
Advocates for Children and Youth (ACY)
Afrikan Youth Alchemy
Allovue
Artesanas Mexicanas
Arts Education in Maryland Schools (AEMS)
Arts Every Day
Baltimore Center Stage
Baltimore City Green Party
Baltimore Teachers Union (BTU)
Baltimoreans for Educational Equity (BEE)
Bash the Trash Environmental Arts
The Bern Unit
Black Cherry Puppet Theater
BmoreSTEM
Bridges Baltimore
Catalyte
Civic Works/REACH! Partnership
Coalition for a Humane Hopkins
Community Law in Action (CLIA)
Code in the Schools
Comité Latino
Creative Nomads
Dance in Time
Digital Harbor Foundation (DHF)
Disability Rights Maryland
FutureMakers
Greater Baltimore DSA
Greater Baltimore Urban League (GBUL)
The Hinkey-Benson Family Fund
Hippodrome Foundation
The Ingenuity Project
The Intersection
It's About the Kids Education Organization
League of Women Voters of Baltimore City
Liberty Village Project
Libraries Without Borders
Living Classrooms
The Marching Elite Foundation
Maryland Alliance of Public Charter Schools
Maryland Center on Economic Policy (MDCEP)
Maryland Out of School Time Network (MOST)
Moms As Entrepreneurs
National Nurses United (NNU)

The Nolita Project
NPower
OpenWorks
Pan y Rosas
The Parents' Place of MD
PCs for People
People's Power Assembly
Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc. - Zeta Sigma Chapter
Progressive Maryland
Project OWN
Single Carrot Theatre
Spotlighters Theatre
SmartLogic
STEM Center of Excellence, Inc
Teachers Democracy Project (TDP)
Ujima People's Progress Party in Maryland
Unidos DMV
Union Baptist Church
Unite Here Local 7
Urban Teachers
Waller Gallery
The Warnock Foundation
Wide Angle Youth Media
Writers in Baltimore Schools