

BROADBAND

Broadband Deployment in Virginia, 2024

RECOMMENDATIONS

Expanding membership of Broadband Advisory Council ► The General Assembly may wish to consider amending § 2.2-2699.3 of the Code of Virginia to expand the membership of the Broadband Advisory Council to include representation from the Virginia Department of Transportation, Virginia811, and investor-owned utilities. (Recommendation 5)

Helping at-risk deployment projects ► The General Assembly may wish to consider including language in the Appropriation Act (1) directing the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) Office of Broadband to identify by July 1, 2025, any broadband deployment projects funded with federal funds set to expire on December 31, 2026, that are unlikely to be completed by that deadline, and, for those projects, (2) requiring the appropriate unit of local government under contract with DHCD for project delivery to, by July 15, 2025, initiate the process to either transfer all or part of the project to another internet service provider, transfer all or part of the project to another active Virginia Telecommunication Initiative funded project, or take another action that would improve the likelihood of project completion by December 31, 2026. (Recommendation 10)

POLICY OPTIONS

Gathering information on low-cost broadband availability ► The General Assembly could include language in Item 103 of the Appropriation Act requiring internet service providers to include in their required annual submission of information to the Department of Housing and Community Development information on the monthly rate customers pay by locality, on average, for the base and low-cost broadband service plans and the speed of the service. (Option 1)

Pilot program to encourage broadband adoption by low-income households ► The General Assembly could direct the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) Office of Broadband to seek federal approval to use Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment program funding to create a pilot program intended to encourage adoption of new broadband service by low-income households. DHCD could (i) include a geographically diverse subset of the state's internet service providers in the program and require them to offer a standardized discounted monthly broadband subscription rate to new customers who meet income eligibility parameters established by DHCD, (ii) evaluate the program's effectiveness in encouraging low-income households to adopt broadband service after six months and one year, (iii) determine whether the program should be expanded and/or extended based on that evaluation, and, if so, (iv) propose a program design, including the estimated amount of necessary funding, in a future budget request. (Option 2)