

Issue: Rural Broadband

## Rural Broadband Talking Points

See [www.localmajority.org/research-reports](http://www.localmajority.org/research-reports) for our complete report:  
*Rural Broadband; Much of Virginia is Underserved*

### Broadband Access Is Essential for Everyone

Broadband service is as crucial to rural Virginia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as electricity and telephones were in the 20<sup>th</sup>. Government helped provide these services back then; the programs have not been effective this time around. Schoolchildren need internet access for learning. Job postings are online; many companies offer work from home. For telemedicine to function, patients and doctors need to interact online while clinics need access to electronic medical records in the cloud. How can a small business maximize its potential or a person show their skills without access to wider markets?

### Rural Virginians Have Lost Out

Despite billions of dollars of federal funds granted to expand broadband into rural areas, at least a quarter of rural Virginians remain without this essential service. Virginia's rural residents lag behind those of neighboring states. FCC numbers show North Carolina and Maryland have high-speed coverage for 84.8% and 94.8% of rural populations. Virginia's figure, at best, is 74.1%. We deserve better.

### How Did We Get Here?

Federal grants have subsidized big corporations, which have done a notably poor job of delivering rural broadband—because it's not profitable to install cable in areas with few customers. States like Minnesota have done well letting local governments create their own infrastructure, owning and managing broadband services. Instead of fostering public-private partnerships, Virginian lawmakers have set up obstacles that have hogtied local government efforts and protected the interests of big corporations.

### We've Shown We Can Do This

Before legal obstructions were put into place, Salem and Roanoke partnered with Roanoke and Botetourt Counties to lay 80 miles of fiber. The Central Virginia Electric Cooperative is running fiber to the homes and businesses of its 37,000 members. The Old Dominion Electric Cooperative formed the Mid-Atlantic Broadband Cooperative. Industry lobbyists point to the failure of Bristol's local network, but this was not a failure of technology or planning, it was a failure of oversight; there was mismanagement and misuse of public funds. Bristol's singular experience is not an excuse to cede power to the big corporations when all evidence points to the effectiveness of local solutions.

### The To-Do List

We must remove legal obstructions and approve more funding for the Virginia Telecommunications Initiative to complete 'last mile' connections to rural homes and businesses. Elizabeth Warren has pledged to fund rural broadband to the tune of \$85 billion and to pass federal laws pre-empting state laws that keep local governments from creating their own networks. But we can't wait for that to happen. We need to change our own state laws, and back Gov. Northam's goal of providing \$50 million annually in state support for broadband connections to rural homes and businesses.