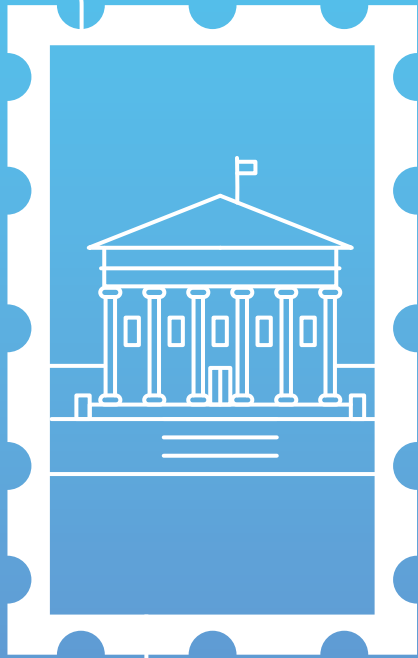# Next Century Cities

# VIRGINIA

**POPULATION: 8.60 MILLION**
**95 COUNTIES AND 38 INDEPENDENT CITIES**

Statewide, 1 in 5 students lack either broadband or a computer at home. Nearly 40% of all students without broadband access live in or around Virginia's cities. Half of all students without devices live in urban areas.

Virginia's state broadband map relies on FCC data. Of 8.5 million residents surveyed, the FCC concluded that 8 million (94.2%) had access to a fixed broadband at minimum speeds.

According to Governor Ralph Northam, rural connectivity is of particular concern in the state. *"The Virginia State Council of Higher Education estimates that 200,000 K-12 students and 60,000 college students in Virginia lack access to broadband at home. Many of those students are in rural areas of our Commonwealth,"* Governor Northam says. The FCC's data provide further evidence of that point, showing that in rural Virginia, service coverage lagged behind urban areas. The FCC found that 1.7 million of 2.1 million rural residents (82.2%) have fixed broadband access.

FCC data on urban Virginia showed that faster mobile Internet and fixed broadband connections were available to a higher percentage of residents. It found that 6.3 of 6.4 million urban residents (98.1%) had access to fixed connections at minimum speeds.

In the NCC member County of Arlington, the FCC evaluated approximately 235,000 people and found that 98.1% had access to a fixed connection at FCC minimum speeds. However, 130 miles away in Goochland County, the FCC found that of the approximately 23,000 people evaluated, only 65.7% had access to a fixed connection at minimum FCC speeds.

Virginia's state broadband map tells a different story than the FCC's data. The Commonwealth of Virginia has been developing its broadband map since 2008 and is sponsored by the Center for Geospatial Information Technology at Virginia Tech, Commonwealth Connect, the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, and Virginia Tech. The map includes an integrated Broadband Planning and Analysis Toolbox.

Three Virginia counties are now working with Appalachian Power by sharing the results of a survey of residents' experiences. One Pulaski County resident, Adam Fariss, who took the survey said that it asked, *"Who our Internet provider is, what our service speeds that we experience are, if we experience any outages, how long those outages may have lasted."* The survey had over 1,300 responses and leaders in each of the three counties hope that the results will help articulate the need for improved broadband access in their communities.

In 2021, Special Session I, the House and Senate passed a budget line item in legislative proposal HB1800 which provides $424,000 for the Virginia's Department of Housing and Community Development to create a statewide broadband map. Notably, the proposal would prohibit broadband providers from having to submit any broadband availability data, in either substantive content or form, beyond that which the provider

is required to submit to the FCC. The public would not be allowed to obtain information submitted by a broadband provider via Freedom of Information Act. Additionally, if HB1800 is enacted into law, Virginia's Housing and Community Development would be allowed to "publish only anonymized versions of the map, showing locations served and unserved by broadband without reference to any specific provider." Provisions like these highlight the need for federal leadership and reevaluating minimum standards for broadband data collection.

Private research also indicates that the FCC's numbers overstate broadband access in Virginia. In August 2019, USTelecom released the results of a fabric mapping pilot including Virginia and one other state and found that as many as 38% of rural locations are unserved in census blocks otherwise considered "served." BroadbandNow offers another point of comparison, showing that Virginia has 83.4% terrestrial broadband coverage and 51.3% to a wired broadband plan that costs less than $60 a month. Microsoft's numbers show even lower rates of adoption, estimating that 3.4 million people out of 8.5 million Virginians do not use the Internet at broadband speeds.

**Additional Resources:**
- Digital Divide: Nearly 1 Million in Va., Md. Have No High-Speed Internet Access
- Virginia Broadband Availability Map