

JENNIFER
CARROLL FOY
FOR GOVERNOR

Dear Virginians,

As a public defender and state Delegate, my number one priority has always been advocating for the interests of Virginia families. And now, I'm running for Governor to make sure that families come first.

Right now, 350,000 Virginia homes and businesses¹ and about 600,000 Virginians,² mostly in Southwest, Southside and the Tidewater areas³ still don't have broadband access. And even when Virginians can access the internet, many are struggling to afford it.⁴ The COVID-19 pandemic forced us to adapt to virtual learning and remote work, and also come face to face with the realities of living without dependable access to the internet, something rural Virginians have experienced for years. But it's also exposed the serious deficiencies in our healthcare system and showed us the urgent need to invest in telehealth.⁵ What's more, from my conversations with small business owners around the Commonwealth, I hear the urgency of quality internet access to allow their businesses to survive, grow, and thrive.

I remember as a girl growing up in Petersburg, we couldn't bring home books and materials for our school work, and this simply cut us off from opportunity. That's exactly what this boils down to and shows just how important this issue is – a lack of access to the internet is a lack of access to opportunity. It's being held back by no fault of your own.

Expanding broadband isn't partisan, but it does take political will and a serious, concerted effort. As Delegate, I fought to pass legislation to make it easier for local providers who are deploying broadband to have access to the infrastructure they need to bring internet access to underserved Virginians.⁶ In this process, I brought together a diverse array of stakeholders: Virginia's Electric Cooperatives, the Virginia Broadband Association, the Virginia Agribusiness Council, the Farm Bureau, the Forestry Association, and the Sierra Club supported the final legislation. I also supported legislation to strengthen public-private partnerships by allowing electric utilities to partner with nongovernmental internet service providers to provide

¹ [Carly Haynes. "Thousands in Virginia without broadband access." CBS 19 News. 09/14/20.](#)

² [Amy Friedenberger. "Virginia is working on getting people internet access, but that plan doesn't include affordability." The Roanoke Times. 12/08/20.](#)

³ [Amy Friedenberger. "Measure to expand broadband in rural Virginia faces uncertain future in budget negotiations." The Roanoke Times. 10/08/20.](#)

⁴ [Amy Friedenberger. "Virginia is working on getting people internet access, but that plan doesn't include affordability." The Roanoke Times. 12/08/20.](#)

⁵ [Amy Friedenberger. "Measure to expand broadband in rural Virginia faces uncertain future in budget negotiations." The Roanoke Times. 10/08/20.](#)

⁶ ["HB 831: Utility easements." Virginia's Legislative Information System. Last Modified 04/10/20.](#)

broadband to underserved communities across the state.⁷ And during the pandemic, I pushed for the equitable distribution of technology and resources to support distance learning.⁸

And as Governor, I am dedicated to ensuring that Virginia remains one of the best states in the nation to do business. That's why I proudly worked with both my Republican and Democratic colleagues and Governor Northam to maintain our AAA bond rating, increase our rainy day fund, and achieve the lowest unemployment rate in recent history. But, it won't be possible to maintain our position as a great place to do business if we do not make serious investments in broadband.

Here's my pledge: by the end of my Administration, 97 percent of Virginians will have access to high speed internet.

I'll work towards Governor Northam's 2018 goal of creating statewide coverage in no more than 10 years⁹ by expanding and streamlining VATI funding, making it easier for small and local providers to serve new communities, collecting and maintaining accurate map data to inform our decisions, and expanding both broadband and fiber-optic infrastructure in our Commonwealth.

Making sure that all Virginians have access to reliable, affordable internet has never been more important, and my administration will take the necessary steps to work towards the goal of guaranteeing broadband for all communities.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Carroll Foy

⁷ ["HB 1280: Electric utilities," Virginia's Legislative Information System, Last Modified 04/06/20.](#)

⁸ ["Leaders urge Northam to protect public schools, students, staff," Augusta Free Press, 04/02/20.](#)

⁹ [Carly Haynes, "Thousands in Virginia without broadband access," CBS 19 News, 09/14/20.](#)

INCREASE FUNDING FOR BROADBAND IN UNDERSERVED AREAS

- **Continue and streamline funding for broadband in underserved areas.** Expansion of broadband is critical to expanding access to telemedicine, virtual learning, and telework for rural and Southwest Virginians,¹⁰ and an important tool for accomplishing this goal is the Virginia Telecommunication Initiative (VATI). The VATI brings broadband to areas that are currently underserved, and prepares these areas to build out stronger telecommunications infrastructure.¹¹ My administration will direct \$50 million annually to VATI between FY22 and FY26. I will also change the way VATI funding is allocated and remove the “overbuild provision,” a restriction that hurts local broadband providers, while favoring cable incumbents. Currently, wireline and wireless providers are ineligible to receive VATI funding if “more than 10% of the proposed project area’s serviceable units have access to service,” and applicants are discouraged from overbuilding in these areas.¹² This system allows cable incumbents to avoid building in areas that might not be as profitable and discourages other providers and local authorities from building in underserved communities, too.
- **Provide adequate staff to make access to rural broadband a reality.** While developing new legislation and policy to expand broadband across our Commonwealth, my administration will also ensure there is adequate funding for the necessary staff to carry out these new priorities and initiatives. Virginia’s broadband efforts are maintained across multiple agencies, including the Department of Housing and Community Development. There are currently two positions within the Office of the Secretary of Commerce and Trade dedicated to overseeing broadband efforts and expansion for our entire Commonwealth. With the push for greater coverage across the state, it’s very likely that additional staff will be required to effectively manage planning, building, and oversight needs. As Governor, I will work to make sure that lack of staff is no longer an obstacle to every Virginian having broadband access.

EXPAND ACCESS TO THE INTERNET IN UNDERSERVED REGIONS

- **Repeal roadblocks preventing municipal broadband authorities from reaching new regions.** During the pandemic, cable companies like Verizon lobbied to make it harder for municipal broadband authorities to compete for state grant funding to expand broadband infrastructure.¹³ Corporate monopolization once again prevented Virginia families from accessing the internet during a public health crisis when it has been most important. That’s why my administration will uplift and incentivize local providers that want to serve unserved and underserved populations by addressing unnecessary barriers that prevent municipal authorities and electric cooperatives from deploying broadband. Currently, Virginia law encumbers localities who want to build their own broadband networks with heavier financing and reporting standards when compared to those of private cable companies.¹⁴ These requirements — “a de facto prohibition of publicly owned broadband networks” — in tandem with limited access to VATI funding

¹⁰ [“JCF-Economic-Policy-Plan, Jennifer Carroll Foy for Governor, 01/26/21.](#)

¹¹ [Virginia Telecommunication Initiative \(VATI\), dhcd.virginia.gov, Last Accessed 02/23/21.](#)

¹² [Erik C. Johnston and Tamarah Holmes, Ph.D.: “2021 Virginia Telecommunication Initiative \(VATI\) Program Guidelines and Criteria.” Virginia DHCD, Last Accessed 02/23/21.](#)

¹³ [“Foy: Cable companies stand in way of rural broadband,” The Roanoke Times, 10/26/20.](#)

¹⁴ <https://broadbandnow.com/report/municipal-broadband-roadblocks/>

maintains the power hold of special interest groups at the expense of unserved consumers.¹⁵ We can no longer turn a blind eye to these practices. Local broadband providers have stepped up to champion unmet needs. My administration will support these efforts by passing legislation to repeal cumbersome roadblocks and permit municipal broadband authorities to compete with the private sector for state funding.

- **Recruit new local broadband providers.** My administration will coordinate with the Office of Broadband to ensure effective outreach efforts for and participation from small, local broadband providers and electric co-ops, who are developing rural broadband solutions in unserved areas of the Commonwealth. We can no longer afford to rely just on cable giants if we want to reach the goal of deploying broadband to all Virginians.
- **Expand broadband infrastructure.** In 2018, the telecommunications industry promoted legislation that Roanoke City Councilman Ray Ferris noted would “remove any meaningful role for localities in the installation of new telecommunication structures and replacement of current technology.”¹⁶ Our local governments and providers, not the cable monopoly, needs to be at the heart of developing and implementing new broadband infrastructure and technology. That’s why as Governor, I will work to accelerate the completion of broadband infrastructure projects by equipping the Virginia Resources Authority to offer full-payment loans to broadband providers approved for Federal Communications Commission (FCC) grant funding. Currently, grant winners receive awarding amounts over a ten-year span, which produces tremendous delays for workers, employers, and communities in need. We must fast-track as many broadband infrastructure projects as possible by adequately funding the Virginia Resources Authority.
- **Invest in innovative public-private partnerships and share best practices.** The pandemic has forced many to find innovative solutions to internet access. For example, Wise County Public Schools recently partnered with SpaceX’s Starlink to offer satellite internet access to students.¹⁷ My administration will convene conferences and summits with school districts, private sector experts, and other stakeholders to share best practices and encourage the types of public-private partnerships that occurred in Wise County. Other school districts should experiment with similar programs, and our Commonwealth’s government should be a resource to them. Additionally, my administration will direct state funding to expand fiber-optic infrastructure in Southwest and Southern Virginia, and I will support the Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission. These measures will help preserve Virginia’s statewide competitiveness in attracting data center investment and jobs by maintaining internet and technological incentives.¹⁸

IMPROVE BROADBAND MAPS TO BETTER TARGET INVESTMENTS

- **Work with the private sector to map broadband access.** Right now, internet service providers like Verizon can manipulate data about the speed their customers receive,¹⁹

¹⁵ <https://muninetworks.org/communitymap>

¹⁶ Matt Chittum, “Roanoke council opposes Va. Bills to loosen telecom regulation,” The Roanoke Times, 02/05/18.

¹⁷ Aimee Knowles, “Wise County Goes Live: School District Solves Internet Problem,” Virginia Dogwood, 01/06/21.

¹⁸ “Fiber Optic Infrastructure, Invest Southern Virginia,” Accessed 02/12/21.

¹⁹ [Shalini Ramachandran, Lillian Rizzo and Drew Fitzgerald, “Your Internet Provider Likely Juiced Its Official Speed Scores.” Wall Street Journal, 12/12/19.](#)

which is why as Governor, I will champion legislation to authorize the Chief Commonwealth Broadband Chief Advisor to develop and maintain a map of private broadband provider service territories, including accurate average broadband speeds in such territories.²⁰ We will adopt methodology similar to the [Georgia Broadband Map project](#), which overlays the locations of homes and business in the state, as well as broadband provider service ability for those locations, in order to map the availability of broadband services to every home and business.²¹ Like Georgia, we will use this data to “better direct investment to reach unserved areas,” and localities and providers can utilize the data to inform their planning efforts.²²

- **Partner with school districts to tackle the homework gap.** While inequities in students’ access to online resources existed long before COVID-19, school districts being forced to move to online learning has highlighted the severity of the “homework gap,” and how many students in Virginia do not have access to a computer or reliable internet at home.²³ School districts now have unique and accurate data as to the areas without access to reliable internet. As Virginia works towards getting our students back to school safely, my administration will partner with school districts to get access to data on where gaps in service exist in order to build the most efficient strategy to ensure that students, educators, and the communities they serve have access to the high speed internet.

PROVIDE VITAL ASSISTANCE TO RURAL AND LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

- **Promote internet affordability.** Unfortunately, access to high speed internet isn’t sufficient. Many households in Virginia, even if they have access to the internet or were to get it, would not be able to afford it. That must change. High speed internet today is as important as electricity is. As Governor, I will pass legislation to authorize localities to offer broadband services to low-income residents and implement a pilot program to subsidize high speed internet access to individuals and families eligible for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits.²⁴
- **Cover remote medical services for rural Virginians.** In my [healthcare policy plan](#), I outlined the importance of expanding telemedicine services, especially for Virginians in rural and underserved communities. An important step my administration will take towards making sure rural and underserved communities can effectively access these vital services is supporting legislation to increase services covered by the Department of Medical Assistance Services to include “remote patient monitoring services for rural and underserved populations.”²⁵

²⁰ [“HB 2214: Broadband service territory maps,” Virginia’s Legislative System, Last Modified 02/05/21.](#)

²¹ [Georgia Broadband Deployment Initiative: Broadband Mapping, broadband.georgia.gov, Last Accessed 02/23/21.](#)

²² [Georgia Broadband Deployment Initiative: Broadband Mapping, broadband.georgia.gov, Last Accessed 02/23/21.](#)

²³ [Alaina Lee and Alexander Marré, “The Homework Gap: Digital Access at Home for Students in the Fifth District,” Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond, 08/28/20; “Senator Mark Warner urges tech companies to help bridge the homework gap,” Augusta Free Press, 08/24/20.](#)

²⁴ [“SB 1462: Virginia Digital Equity Pilot Program and Fund,” Virginia’s Legislative Information System, Last Modified 03/01/21.](#)

²⁵ [“SB 1416: DMAS,” Virginia’s Legislative Information System, Last Modified 1/21/21.](#)