

Affordability challenges for broadband service: What the data show

My name is John B. Horrigan and I am a Senior Fellow with the Benton Institute for Broadband & Society, as well as a resident of Baltimore City. The views that follow are my own.

Today I will offer my support for House Bill 382, which requires certain broadband providers in Maryland to provide for qualified low-income households a low-cost broadband service option. My message today is that there is ample data to support taking steps to make broadband more affordable for Maryland residents.

A majority of the low-income households have difficulty affording broadband service. A national [survey conducted in 2024](#) of households whose annual incomes are \$50,000 or less found that 53% said it was difficult to afford the monthly broadband service fee.

For low-income households, broadband service is often contingent on the ups-and-downs of the economy. Job losses, reduction in hours, or increases in costs elsewhere in the household budget can result in households disconnecting broadband service. The term for this is [subscription vulnerability](#) – the [43% of low-income households](#) nationally who find it very difficult to afford service, have suffered service disconnection because they could not pay the bill, and live near the poverty line.

Affordability challenges know no geography. It is not uncommon to think of rural broadband challenges as mainly about infrastructure; rural households subscribe to broadband at a lower rate than others because no (or inadequate) service is available. There is truth to this, but close analysis shows that network deployment explains about [28% of lower rural broadband adoption](#) rates. Non-deployment factors make up the balance – and affordability of service is chief among them. Incomes are lower and rates broadband rates tend to be higher in rural areas, underscoring the broadband affordability challenge many rural residents face.

Broadband affordability problems are likely to grow for two reasons.

1. The non-partisan [Congressional Budget Office estimates](#) that The One Big Beautiful Bill (OBBB) will reduce household resources for low-income Americans (i.e., the lowest 20% of the income distribution) by \$1,200 annually in the coming decade. This could result in [5.6 million households](#) nationwide losing broadband connectivity – and as many as 76,000 in Maryland.
2. Internet service providers offer [fewer low-cost service plans](#) today than just a few years ago. In 2022, 9% of all broadband service offerings were priced at \$30 per month or less, a figure that fell to just 3% in 2025.

Finally, it is important to emphasize the policy interventions to bring more people [online benefits us all](#). Broadband is pathway to employment – and income increases. Broadband is a tool in delivering health care – at sizable savings to providers and patients alike. Yet the hurdles for purchasing and maintaining home connectivity are real and growing for low-income Marylanders. HB 382 can help lower these hurdles.