

# Built, Overbuilt, and Untouched: A Ripple Fiber Analysis of the U.S. Fiber Landscape

*Based on FCC Broadband Data Collection December 2024, June 2025, and December 2025*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The U.S. fiber buildout is at an inflection point where some markets are oversaturated while others are completely untouched. The first era of the U.S. fiber buildout is ending. Not because the work is done, but because the easy markets are filling up. What comes next, who builds where, and whether those decisions are driven by data or momentum, will define the competitive landscape for the next decade. The providers who understand which side of that divide they're operating on will make fundamentally different decisions than those who don't.

In this analysis, the 48 contiguous states and Washington, D.C. are covered. Alaska, Hawaii, and U.S. territories were not included.

## KEY STATISTICS:

- Fiber-served locations jumped from 61.7M to 71.0M in roughly one year
- 82% of cable BSLs now face fiber competition, up from 67% twelve months ago
- Ten counties with over 20,000 housing units have exceeded 95% fiber penetration
- Over 1.2 million homes across ten counties remain below 5% fiber penetration

## HOW TO READ THE DATA

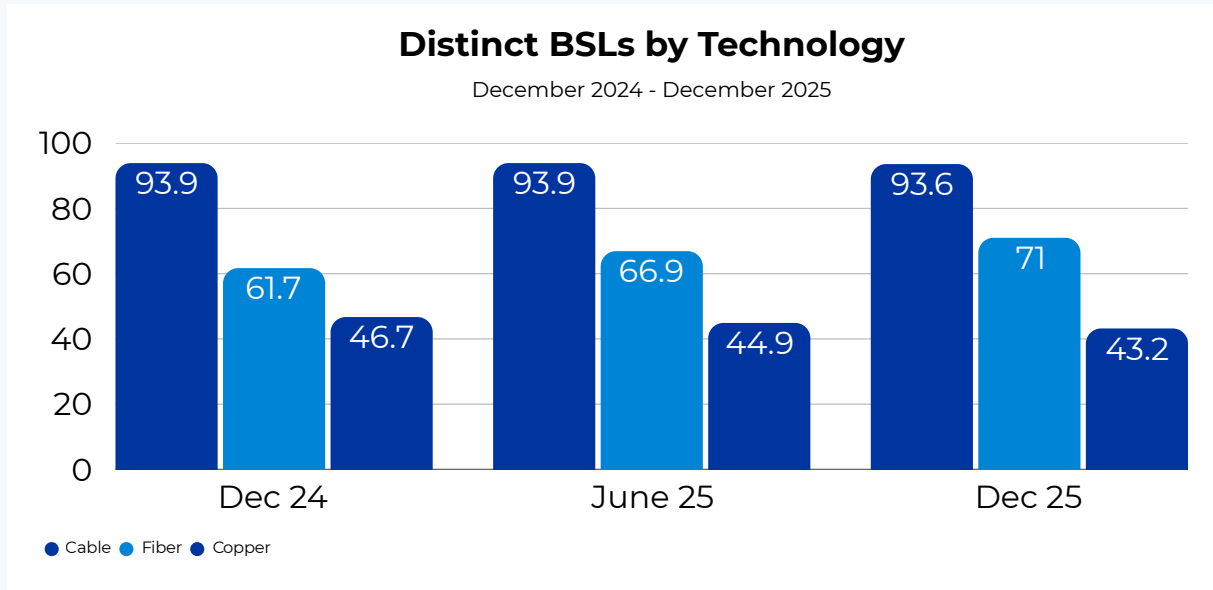
The FCC requires all facilities-based broadband providers to report, twice a year, every location where they can provide service within 10 business days of a request. That data becomes the National Broadband Map, the most comprehensive broadband availability dataset in the U.S.

As the main unit of measurement throughout this data release, Broadband Serviceable Location (BSL) is a distinct address, residential or business, that can receive broadband service. Note that BSL count and household count are related but not identical, which is why some counties show fiber penetration above 100%.

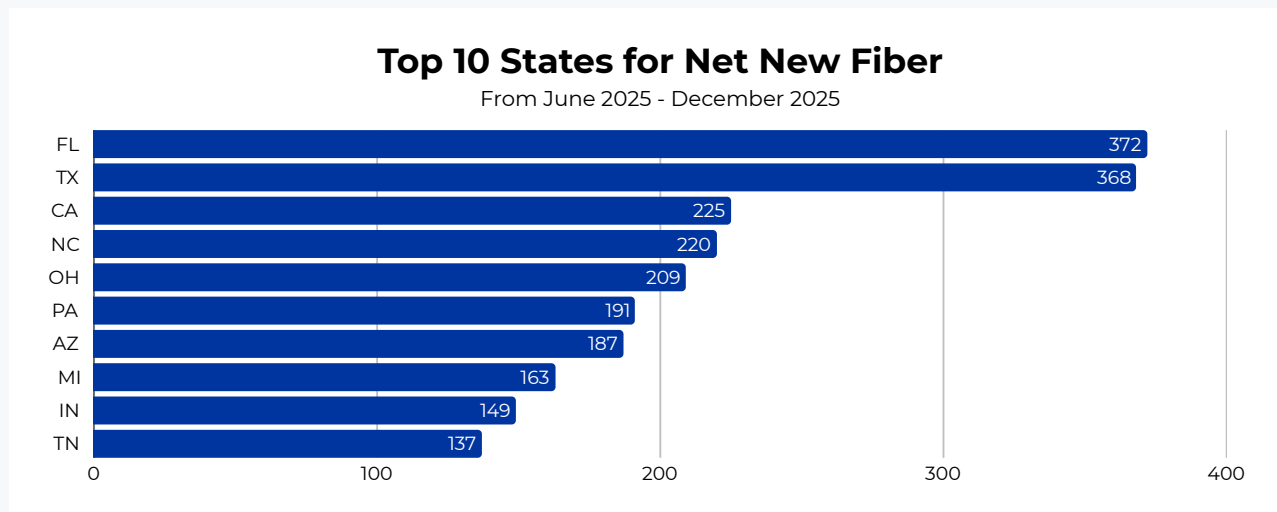
The FCC releases data semiannually. The most current data available reflects deployment as of December 31, 2025, released to providers ahead of public map publication. Where estimates are used, such as the overlap calculation between cable and fiber BSLs, margins of approximately  $\pm 2$  percentage points apply.

# Who Built Where and What It Cost Them

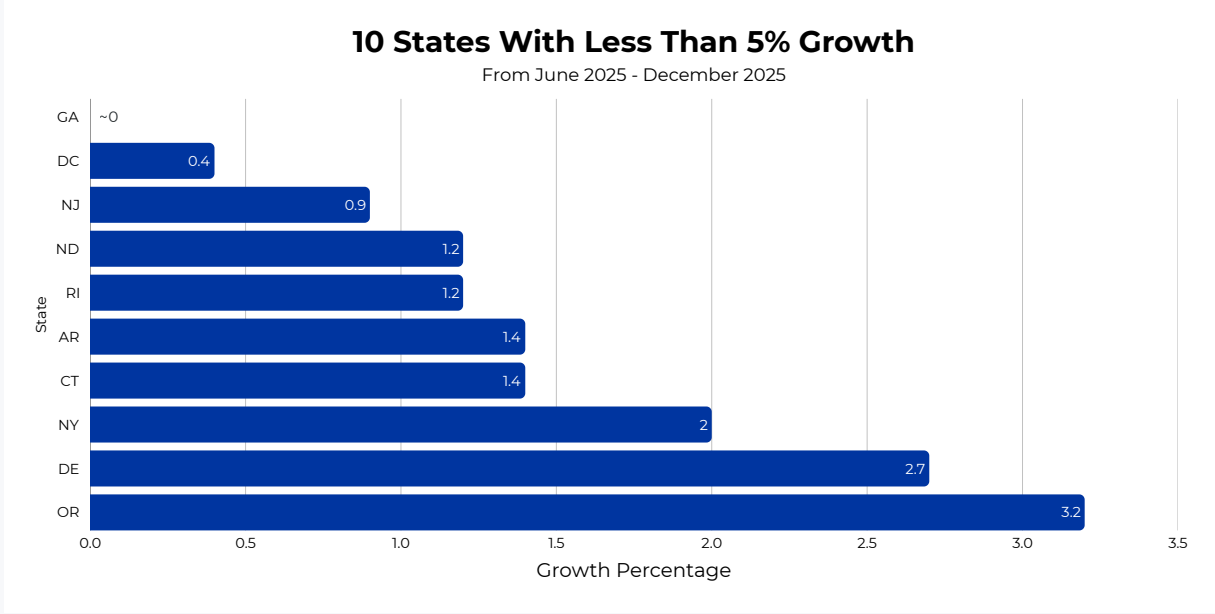
The national fiber footprint grew tremendously from December 2024 to December 2025. Distinct fiber-served locations increased from 61.7 million to 71.0 million in roughly one year, while cable was virtually flat with a decrease of 0.3%. This demonstration of broadband growth across the United States is remarkable, yet it showcases how uneven the investment is between fiber and cable.



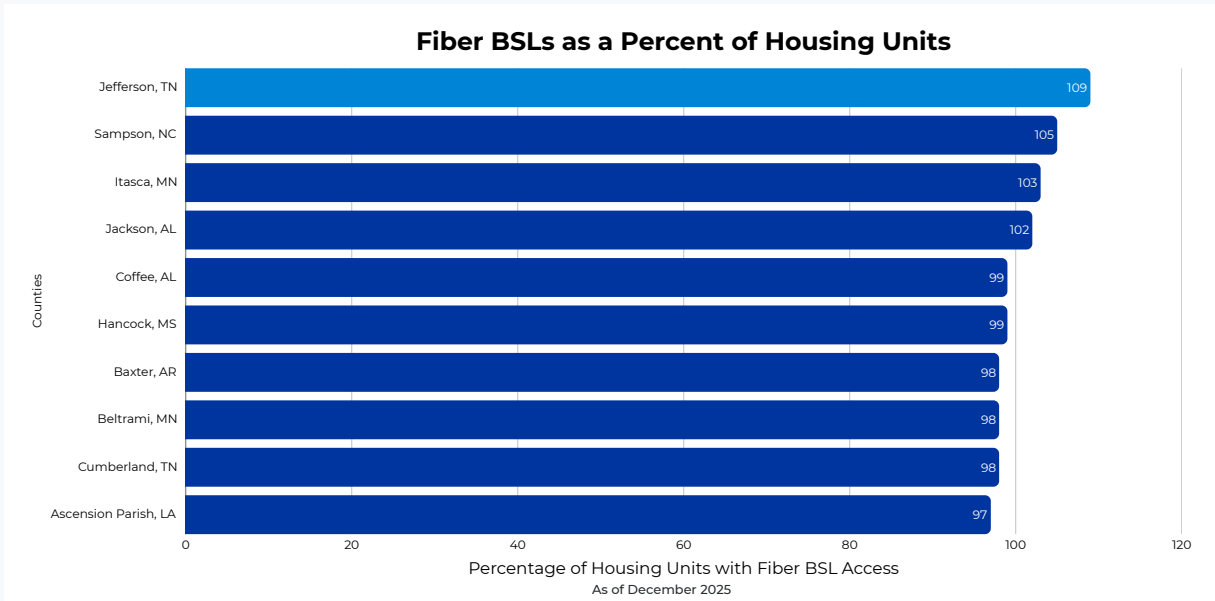
Three states made the greatest strides in fiber growth: Florida, Texas, and California. Florida accomplished the country's biggest swing. This state alone added nearly 327,000 fiber BSLs between June 2025 and December 2025, making up about a sixth of all net new locations from the top 10 states combined. Texas and California took the next two slots. Most of these gains occurred in already-dense markets, where deployment economics are strongest, and returns can be realized faster. While that strategy makes financial sense, it also highlights an emerging challenge for the industry: the next phase of fiber expansion will likely require more complex economics, deeper collaboration, and a greater focus on the communities that remain underserved.



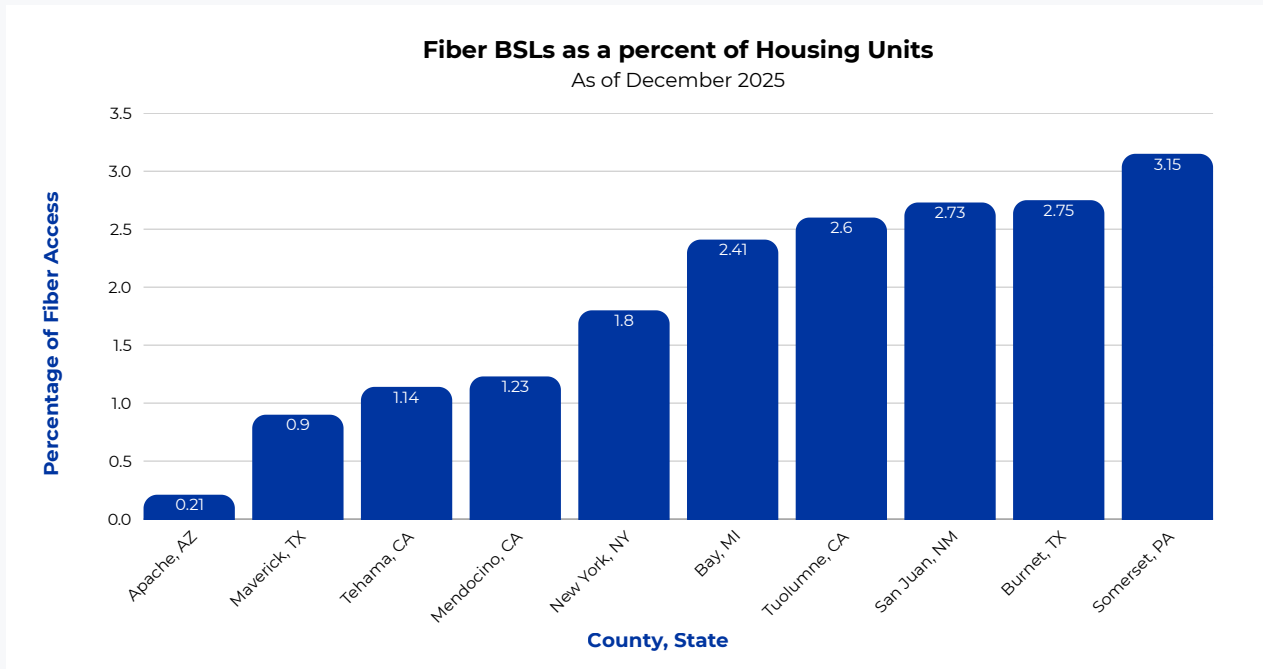
Ten areas are slowing or stabilizing with under 5% growth between June 2025 and December 2025. These areas include Georgia, Washington D.C., New Jersey, North Dakota, Rhode Island, Arkansas, Connecticut, New York, Delaware, and Oregon. For those homes, this isn't a just market statistic. It's another year without a fiber option. Georgia experienced a net decline of 16,144 BSLs, effectively zero growth. It's important to note that growth patterns vary over time, and several of these markets saw stronger expansion in earlier reporting periods. This data reflects a mix of conditions, like potential saturation in some areas and fewer remaining build opportunities in others.



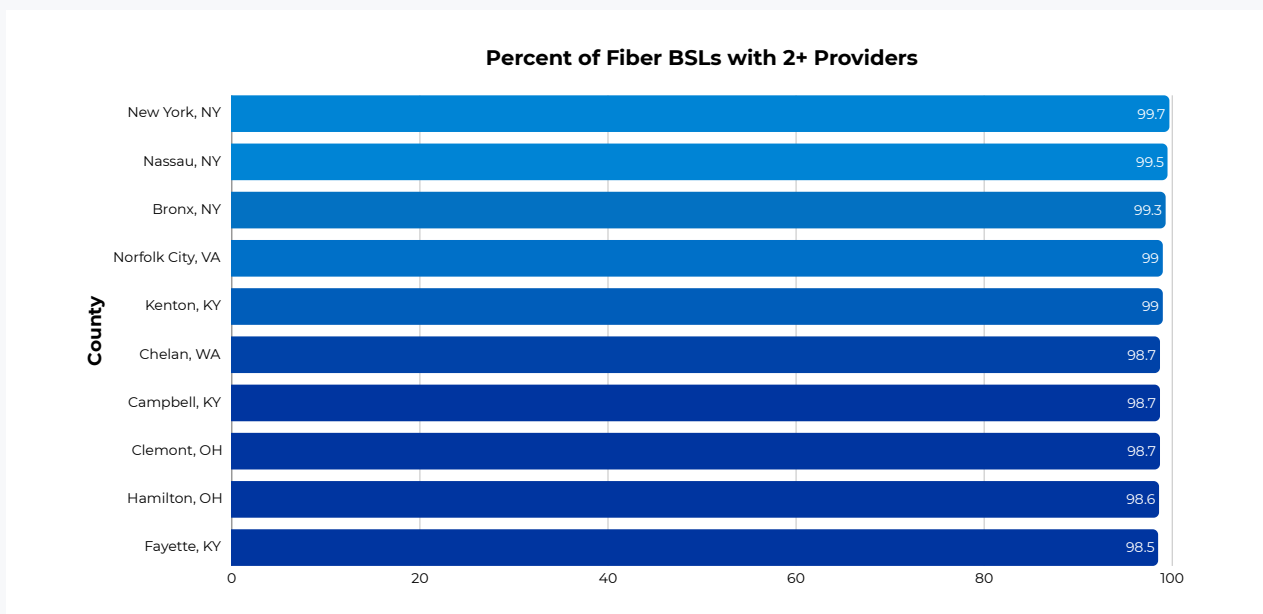
Ten counties with more than 20,000 housing units have now surpassed 95% fiber penetration, each located in the South or Midwest region. These include Jefferson, TN; Sampson, NC; Itasca, MN; Jackson, AL; Coffee, AL; Hancock, MS; Baxter, AR; Beltrami, MN; Cumberland, TN; and Ascension Parish, LA. Some areas now exceed 100% fiber-serviceable locations relative to housing units. That's a strong indicator of parallel builds on the same streets, where providers are now competing on service quality, customer experience, pricing strategy, and retention, not just access. These markets are early examples of what late-stage fiber market economics look like.



Apache County, AZ sits below 0.3% fiber penetration despite having roughly 28,000 homes. In California, Tehama, Tuolumne, and Mendocino counties all remain under half a percent, and these are not small markets. They are sizable counties where large portions of the population are still awaiting fiber. The first provider to enter has the opportunity to establish its footprint, build customer relationships early, and shape long-term market dynamics before competition arrives. Across just ten underserved counties like these, over 1.2 million homes remain without meaningful fiber access.



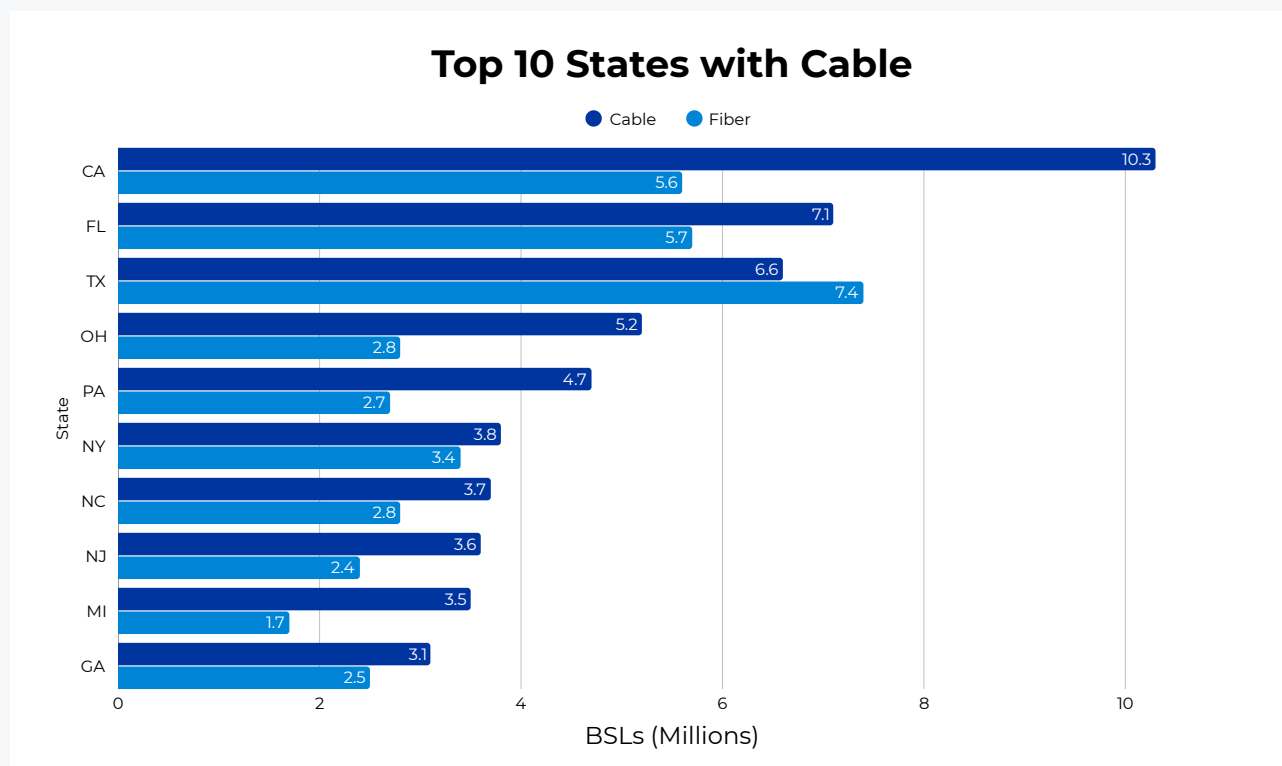
The most overbuilt counties sit in New York, Virginia, Kentucky, Washington, and Ohio. When more than 100% of fiber BSLs in a county are served by two or more providers, the same address is being passed by multiple networks. This means these areas are often highly competitive, even when overall countywide fiber penetration may still lag. Nassau County, NY stands out as one of the clearest examples, with 93% of fiber locations already served by at least three providers. As this dynamic increases, the economics change quickly. Build costs rise, margins compress, and customer churn increases as providers compete for the same households.



# Cable's Response and Where Fiber Has Already Won

Twelve months ago, 67% of cable broadband serviceable locations faced fiber competition. Today, that number has climbed to 82%, leaving only 18% of cable's footprint without a fiber competitor. In many markets, cable's moat is quickly disappearing. Cable operators are responding with accelerated Data Over Cable Service Interface Specification (DOCSIS) upgrades, but the sequence matters. Fiber expansion most likely forced the response.

Texas is now one of the clearest examples of this shift, with more fiber broadband serviceable locations than cable as of December 2026. Florida, California, Ohio, and Pennsylvania still lean cable-heavy by footprint, but the trajectory is becoming increasingly clear. Other major cable states include New York, North Carolina, New Jersey, Michigan, and Georgia.



The DOCSIS 3.1 mid-split and early DOCSIS 4.0 deployments pushed the 2–5 Gbps tier, growing from 24.4% to 30.2% of cable rows. However, these speed tier upgrades don't change the underlying asymmetry of the technology or the customer perception gap that fiber has built.

Where fiber and cable now coexist, the competition shifts from availability to service quality, price, and brand. That's a different game than the one most fiber providers were built to play.

# The Markets That Matter and Why

The fiber market is beginning to split. Some counties are effectively done being built, while others remain largely untouched. The providers that succeed in the next phase of broadband expansion will likely be those that accurately categorize markets before committing capital. Three trends stand out in the data: overbuild fatigue, first-mover opportunity, and cable's DOCSIS timeline.

## OVERBUILD FATIGUE

In highly penetrated markets, margins are tightening as multiple providers compete for the same households. Over time, that environment may lead to consolidation, wholesale agreements, or reduced expansion activity. Nassau County, NY is a leading example.

## FIRST-MOVER OPPORTUNITY

More than 1.2 million homes across lowest-penetration counties still lack meaningful fiber access, representing one of the clearest remaining greenfield opportunities in the U.S. fiber market. That window is open but not permanent.

## CABLE'S DOCSIS TIMELINE

Cable providers are accelerating DOCSIS 4.0 upgrades to increase network speeds and defend market share as fiber expansion continues. If those deployments move faster than expected, the competitive window in many mid-density markets could narrow fiber penetration or uptake.

The data from FCC Broadband Data Collection December 2025 doesn't tell a single story. It tells several, depending on where providers are building. Those who pay attention to the full picture, not just the data points that confirm their own strategy, will make sharper decisions than those who do not. The competitive landscape is shifting too quickly for assumptions to hold for long, and the operators who keep up with the data will be the ones who successfully adapt to it.

# Appendix

- Data sources: FCC Broadband Data Collection from December 31, 2024, June 30, 2025, and December 31, 2025, accessed ahead of public map publication
- Definition of BSL as used throughout
- Explanation of the HyperLogLog set arithmetic used for cable/fiber overlap estimates, with the  $\pm 2pp$  margin noted
- Note: Provider-reported data reflects self-certification to the FCC and is subject to challenge processes.