

## **Are you a Georgian Black Business Owner? You Might See a Higher Internet Bill Starting This Week**

**Malika Redmond and Michael Huggins**

If you're a Black business owner in Georgia, your internet bill might go up this week. Black Georgians already are feeling the effects of inflation, including the high cost of rent, food, child care and running businesses in the United States. Black residents in Georgia also have experienced the brunt of [unemployment](#) and joblessness at a higher rate than their white counterparts. Despite claims of improved wages and a robust economy, many Black people feel as if they can do very little to prevent their hard-earned money from [walking out the door](#). In addition to their jobs, Black people traditionally have had "side hustles" with home-based or micro businesses to earn a dollar to support their families and gain middle class status. That tradition became even more pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Building out virtual and online ways to reach potential customers became critical to earning money, and for low-wealth entrepreneurs, access to affordable Wi-Fi remains vital. However, affordable high speed internet benefits are set to end this week unless Congress votes to replenish these funds.

When the world shut down during the COVID-19 pandemic, it became evident that broadband access was not just critical for digital equity, it was becoming critical for access to telehealth, education, financial services and making a living. In November 2021, President Joe Biden signed into law the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, which authorized \$65 billion for high speed internet. [Georgia has received a little under \\$390 million in funding for affordable broadband access under the Affordable Connectivity Program \(ACP\)](#). This means nearly 725,000 households in Georgia are saving about \$30 to \$75 each month on their internet bills, and Georgia can potentially [reduce the number of businesses and residences without internet by more than 130,000 by 2026](#).

Digital tools and broadband access have been critical for driving innovation with Black businesses. [Eighty-five percent](#) of Black businesses nationwide cited digital tools as a key part of their operation. Around [80% of Black businesses](#) considered digital tools critical in driving their revenue. [Black business owners](#) are also more likely to start their own businesses than other ethnic groups. Access to online e-commerce platforms have become crucial for current and aspiring Black business owners. These platforms often highlight Black businesses for consumers and quickly connect customers to those businesses via the internet.

While funds for high-speed internet have [helped over 722,000 Georgian households](#) afford broadband access, Black communities are concerned that this critical benefit will be taken away during a time when they need it the most. There's anxiety that [digital redlining](#), or the systematic exclusion of marginalized communities from access to digital resources and opportunities, will further prevent Black communities and businesses in Georgia from accessing available funds for high-speed internet.

Time is running out. Black businesses and communities in Georgia deserve more than broken promises, stretched pocketbooks and fewer opportunities. If Congress does not act immediately, Georgia businesses, particularly in Black communities, are going to see higher internet bills. This will be devastating. Business owners will carry these high prices into the voting booth when they vote in the fall. We urge the State of Georgia and elected officials in Georgia to not forget the many businesses and communities that require broadband access to be safe and healthy. State and local officials must ensure that Congress understands the importance of broadband access and passes the ACP Extension Act to maintain funding for this critical benefit. We cannot let Black businesses in Georgia fall into the digital and economic divide.

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