

Severed cable takes out Virginia voter site on registration deadline



Enlarge / Richmond, the capital of Virginia, looking scenic as seen from across the James River.

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Today is the last day to register to vote in the commonwealth of Virginia, so of course the official website for updating or managing voter registration is offline. Unlike in Florida, however, Virginia's site did not crash from high traffic but instead was rendered inaccessible because a vital fiber connecting the state's digital infrastructure was physically

cut.

Twitter users began to notice the state's voter registration page was failing to load sometime after 8:30 this morning, and at 9:00, the state's IT agency confirmed that a severed fiber optic cable was the root of all the problems.

"A fiber cut near Rt. 10 in Chester near the Commonwealth Enterprise Solutions Center (CESC) is impacting data circuits and virtual private network (VPN) connectivity for multiple Commonwealth agencies," the Virginia Information Technologies Agency wrote in a tweet, adding, "Technicians are on site and working to repair the cut; updates will be provided as work progresses."

In an update posted just before 1pm, VITA said the fiber was "inadvertently struck as part of activities related to a Chesterfield County roadside utilities project" but did not have an estimate for when repairs might be completed.

The severed cable affects not only voter registration, but also early in-person voting—underway across Virginia since September 18—in some jurisdictions because election officials use network-connected tablets to look up and verify voter information. Several other state systems have also been affected by the outage, including DMV operations, unemployment systems, and Virginia's COVID-19 dashboard and health information.

Virginia Lieutenant Governor Justin Fairfax called for the commonwealth to extend the voter registration deadline in light of the network failure. "We will work with the Administration to resolve this issue and ensure all voters have access to #Vote," Fairfax said in a tweet.

The outage is hopefully a temporary blip in an otherwise robust election season for the commonwealth. Thanks to a combination of pandemic concerns and expanded voter access laws that took effect on July 1, early in-person and mail-in

voting in Virginia this year has already smashed all previous records for the state. Almost 17 percent of all registered voters in Virginia, more than 975,000 individuals, had already cast their ballots as of October 11.

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