REMARKS OF
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ON RECEIVING
FAMILY ONLINE SAFETY INSTITUTE
AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT
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Good afternoon. Thank you to the Family Online Safety Institute for having me here and honoring me with this award. The work you do is so important—and I mean that as both a policymaker and a parent. Your efforts to help keep children safe and secure in the digital age have never been more critical. So it's terrific to see so many organizations and individuals from the private sector and public sector come together at your conference in service of this goal.

It may be a cliché, but it's still true—it was easier when I was young. I recognize the fact that I'm even saying this might be a sign that I'm getting old. But think about it. There was a single screen. I watched what was on when it was on. When my parents plunked me down in front of Sesame Street, they could rest assured that the antics of Big Bird and friends would both enrich and entertain.

Now fast forward to the present. We live in an age of always-on connectivity. The number of screens has multiplied. Increases in broadband capacity coupled with decreases in the cost of cloud computing are changing the ways we access content. So many of our social spaces are virtual. Plus mobility means the invisible infrastructure of our airwaves is responsible for so much more than television.

In fact, from my perch at the Federal Communications Commission, I can tell you that we are now a nation with more mobile phones than people. Half of all adults now have a tablet computer. As our screens proliferate, no surprise, our children's habits are changing. Children still watch on average between three to four hours of television a day. But three-quarters of all kids now also have access to a mobile device like a smartphone or tablet. Seventy-two percent of all children under age eight have used these devices for some kind of media activity. Almost one in five now do so on a daily basis. Among teenagers, half own their own smartphones. Nine in ten have used social media and 95 percent use the Internet regularly.

But no one here needs these statistics to be convinced. Nor do I—because I am the parent of two digital natives. Just watching them, it is obvious how our world has changed—even if Sesame Street has stood the test of time.

My children will never know appointment television. They will never know the heft of an encyclopedia or the burden of a backpack with a ton of textbooks. My kids expect to play games for math class and to have any information at any time at their fingertips. They expect every screen to respond to them at the swipe of their finger.

As a parent, this brave new digital world can be daunting. Curating the vast array of children's media and educational materials online takes effort and expertise. When life, as my

own, involves two parents, with two jobs, two children, and too few hours in the day this is not easy. But like the Family Online Safety Institute, I am convinced that there is incredible benefit when it comes to children and technology. The challenge comes in wrestling with new technology and making it work for us.

As a policymaker, this led me to press and push the FCC to update its E-Rate program. E-Rate is the nation's largest educational technology program and it is run by the FCC. It is a byproduct of the Telecommunications Act of 1996—and it is the reason why schools and libraries in communities all across the country are connected to the Internet today.

But good programs do not thrive without continuous attention and care. Because the challenge for our schools and libraries is no longer connection—it's capacity. So I am proud to say that the FCC has begun to reboot the E-Rate program, placing a new premium on capacity and bringing big bandwidth to all of our schools and libraries. We have more work to do to right-size this program and its budget, but we have already made significant progress. As a result, more schools will be more connected at higher speeds. That means more opportunities to teach with tools and content designed for the digital age.

But our efforts to should not stop with E-Rate.

A while back the Wall Street Journal published a sobering article about students without web access at home studying at fast food restaurants—because they have Wi-Fi. It described parents in cars in parking lots with their children sitting in the back seat doing their homework—just to get the wireless signal they need to complete basic school assignments.

Today, roughly seven in ten teachers assign homework that requires access to broadband. But FCC data suggest nearly one in three households do not subscribe to broadband services at any speed—citing lack of affordability, lack of relevance, and lack of interest.

Think about these numbers. Where they overlap is what I call the "Homework Gap." Think about what it means to be a student in a household without broadband—typically low income and often rural. It means just getting schoolwork done is hard. It means applying for a scholarship is challenging. While low-income families are adopting smartphones with Internet access at high rates, let me submit to you right now that a phone is not how you want to research and type a paper, apply for jobs, or further your education.

The Homework Gap is real. A recent study by the Pew Research Center found that more than half of teachers in low-income communities said that their students' lack of access to online resources at home presented a major challenge to integrating technology into their teaching. So not only are students that lack access at home struggling to keep up, their lack of access is holding our education system back. It means too many of our young people will go through school without developing the skills that give them a fair shot in the digital age.

The good news is we can do something about it. We can study innovative broadband adoption programs across the country. I think we can learn more from them. At the same time,

we need to take a fresh look at the FCC's Lifeline program. Because I think we can modernize the Lifeline program and close the Homework Gap.

Lifeline is a program that supports telephone access in 14 million low-income households today. It has been in place at the FCC since 1985—when most communications involved a cord, compact discs were new, and President Ronald Reagan was in the White House. That was a long time ago. We need to update it for the broadband era. That means providing households with the opportunity to instead apply that same support to broadband service. This is going to take time—but it's a conversation we need to start now.

If you are here today, I hope you will be a part of that conversation. Because the Homework Gap is the cruelest part of the digital divide. But it's also within our power to bridge it. So if you are here, you care about children getting the best out of our digital world. You know the incredible things technology can deliver to students and that online safety and security matter. So I hope you'll work with me and the FCC to build a better Lifeline program, develop ideas that will help us address the Homework Gap, and give all children a fighting chance for success in the 21st century. As a policymaker and parent—I think that is something worth fighting for.

Thank you.