

**REMARKS OF  
COMMISSIONER GEOFFREY STARKS  
COMCAST INTERNET ESSENTIALS EXPANSION KICKOFF EVENT  
MIAMI, FL  
AUGUST 6, 2019**

Thank you, David, for that introduction and for inviting me here today. Thank you also to the Comcast team as well as CareerSource for hosting this event today in Miami, Florida.

One of the things that has always impressed me about Miami is the pride you have in your city. Miami is a place that's about uplifting the community and that's truly a reason to be proud. The people of Miami do everything in their power to ensure that their families, their neighbors, and their coworkers, have the tools necessary to succeed.

We understand that success is only possible when communities have access to educational tools; when communities have access to health services; when communities have access to workforce training. And in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, all of that access and, in turn, the opportunity to succeed, requires a reliable and affordable internet connection.

Unfortunately, millions of hardworking Americans don't have and can't afford home internet access. Without reliable and affordable access to the internet, the single dad enrolled in Miami Dade College can't submit his assignment online; the visual arts student at the New World School of the Arts can't upload a submission to a national film festival from home; the abuela in Little Havana can't fill her prescriptions through an online portal.

For years, people have referred to the gap between those with internet access and those without as the "digital divide." But that phrase doesn't fully capture what's really happening. Our digital divide has persisted now for many years and, as a result, it is hardening into an internet inequality.

How much money someone makes or what kind of job they have shouldn't be a barrier to pursuing an education, accessing healthcare, or fulfilling a dream of starting a business. Unfortunately, by many measures, it is. Countless reports, and my conversations with folks across the country, indicate to me that one of the largest barriers to internet access is affordability. The average family spends \$2,700 per year on their internet, phone and cable. For many, that's just too much. With incomes flat and increasing housing, educational, and healthcare expenses, Americans in Miami and throughout this country have to make incredibly tough choices when it comes to deciding whether to add another costly monthly expense to their budget.

That's why I'm pleased to see the expansion of the Internet Essentials program throughout the Comcast footprint to include low-income households that receive government assistance like SNAP, Medicaid or SSI. This makes opportunities like the ones I just mentioned attainable for more people in our respective communities.

But a good program doesn't execute itself. Community problems require community solutions. That's why I'm also happy to see the list of 10,000 non-profit partners enlisted to help with outreach and training on Internet Essentials throughout the country. When companies partner with trusted community organizations, programs like this can flourish.

Without efforts to make internet access more affordable, the already existing internet inequality will only crystallize further. Make no mistake, this gets to fundamental issues of inclusion, and what kind of country we want to live in. As a Commissioner, I have seen up close the true costs to America by having so many folks left behind in our digital world, and the widening chasm of broadband haves and have-nots threatens central and core notions of our shared culture as Americans.

Internet inequality is an issue that must be fixed now, not sometime in the distant future. Access to the internet impacts almost every social, political, and economic facet of our lives. Private programs, like Internet Essentials, play a truly significant role, along with action from my agency back in Washington, DC, and state and local governments across the country. And often, a marriage of public and private action can make a significant dent in a societal problem. I want to live in a society where we understand that good policies are those that center voices at the margins, empower the most disempowered, and uplift the most vulnerable amongst us. And, to achieve that, we all have to do our part. That's the Miami way, and that's why you have good reason to be proud.

Thank you again to Comcast and CareerSource for inviting me here today and thank you to all of you for the important work that you're doing in the Miami community to ensure that the internet reaches everyone. I look forward to collaborating with all of you on how to solve the problem of internet inequality both here in Miami and across the United States. Thank you.