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For Immediate Release**COMMISSIONER STARKS STATEMENT ON
THE FCC'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19**

WASHINGTON, March 12, 2020—FCC Commissioner Geoffrey Starks issued the following statement on the need for a strong FCC response to COVID-19:

The FCC and communications networks have an integral role to play in responding to the novel coronavirus. In times of emergency, Americans always pull together and help those most in need. This is no doubt true of COVID-19. With social distancing and even quarantine being required, as they may soon be in many American communities, broadband connections will become even more vital. Everyone in the telecommunications sector must step up. The time is now. Americans are going to need broadband in their homes—to help them telework to keep the economy strong; to help them understand medical information, and potentially connect with medical care via telemedicine; and to help our youngest learners continue to grow.

The FCC must join that effort immediately with emergency steps that bring broadband into homes in communities impacted by COVID-19. We should consider expediting waivers and experimental licenses that will expand network capabilities; creating additional Wi-Fi capacity by temporarily authorizing use of the 5.9 GHz band; awarding grants for capacity upgrades in underserved communities impacted by the coronavirus; and encouraging providers to waive data caps, offer low-cost program options that could extend a basic internet connection for millions of Americans, and deploy their emergency assets, such as cell sites on wheels, to unserved communities.

The FCC should also deploy a “connectivity and economic stimulus” plan to leverage and expand the effectiveness of the billions we administer annually in existing universal service programs. We should consider an emergency distribution of funds to rapidly increase the number of lendable hotspots available through schools and libraries.

We should also urgently consider increasing the amount of money Lifeline—the only federal program designed to bring affordable communications to our most vulnerable Americans—provides for basic connectivity, raising data caps, and easing enrollment burdens. As the novel coronavirus forces more people to stay home, I know many people in the communications sector are concerned that some Lifeline

beneficiaries who qualify based on their participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program may no longer be able to meet that program's work requirements. We will need to work through points like these that regard our larger social safety net, but keeping SNAP beneficiaries connected is a problem the FCC can and must fix.

By increasing access to broadband, we can help ensure that people who need treatment can seek it safely and those who need to be at home can stay there. As recent stock market activity made clear, this health crisis may have dramatic economic consequences. By deploying this "connectivity and economic stimulus," the FCC's funding programs can contribute to and amplify the stimulus packages that policymakers are now considering. We should start the FCC's emergency response today.

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