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For Immediate Release**COMMISSIONER STARKS STATEMENT ON BROADBAND AND TELEPHONE COMPANIES' PLEDGE TO KEEP AMERICANS CONNECTED**

WASHINGTON, March 13, 2020: Commissioner Geoffrey Starks issued the following statement regarding the pledge by broadband and telephone providers to not terminate residential or small business consumers for the next 60 days, open access to public Wi-Fi hotspots, and waive late fees:

“More and more Americans are being asked to support the public health effort by staying home. That means taking our daily activities—work, school, medical care, and connecting with loved ones—online. But for the tens of millions of Americans without broadband access at home, that’s simply not an option. Closing the digital divide has always been my top priority as a Commissioner; today, it’s more essential than ever to our safety and our economic security.

I applaud the broadband companies that have decided to make changes to their business practices to support the response to COVID-19. This is a great start. Now, the FCC needs to join the effort and implement the steps that I outlined in my Senate testimony on Tuesday and highlighted throughout this week.

First, we should expand the reach and power of our universal service programs. That should include quickly increasing the stock of lendable free hotspots available through schools and public libraries, expanding the reach of telemedicine, and enhancing Lifeline—the only federal program designed to bring affordable communications to low-income Americans and a critical aspect of our social safety net.

Second, we should eliminate red tape and extend regulatory flexibility to allow broadband providers to quickly expand access. The Commission could, for example, expedite decisions on waivers and experimental licenses that would let providers leverage underutilized wireless spectrum or new technologies to increase their capacity and reach.

Finally, we must continue to partner with industry to meet the needs of low-income Americans, who will disproportionately bear the burdens of this crisis. That means waiving overage fees and data caps in affected communities. I will also continue

to call on providers to create or expand programs providing low-cost internet access. I am pleased that some companies have already taken this step. Others should act now.”

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*This is an unofficial announcement of Commission action. Release of the full text of a Commission order constitutes official action.
See MCI v. FCC, 515 F.2d 385 (D.C. Cir. 1974).*