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For Immediate Release**COMMISSIONER STARKS STATEMENT AT
THE FCC'S MARCH 2020 OPEN MEETING**

WASHINGTON, March 31, 2020—FCC Commissioner Geoffrey Starks issued the following statement at the Federal Communications Commission's March 31, 2020 Open Meeting:

"I believe the FCC must enact a "connectivity stimulus" to see Americans through the coronavirus crisis and power our economy. While this battle has many fronts, our response should start with the \$8 billion the FCC administers to bring communications services to students, the low-income, and rural communities. As a result of COVID-19, last week saw a staggering 3.3 million Americans file for unemployment benefits—by far the largest surge in United States history.¹ The time to expand affordable broadband options and Lifeline for struggling Americans is now. In times of emergency, no American should go without a connection because of cost. Moreover, at the same time, roughly 45 million K-12 students have been sent home—millions of them to disconnected homes—as a result of school closures that may last through the end of the year. Our long-standing digital divide has morphed into a monstrous new COVID-19 divide. The time to expand the reach of E-rate is now. And COVID-19 has made social distancing a challenging but essential part of the practice of medicine for physicians like my father and two brothers. The time to expand telemedicine is now.

As I recently said in a New York Times op-ed,² for the first time ever, in responding to an emergency pandemic, Americans will rely on the internet extensively for an indeterminate amount of time. When public health requires social distancing and quarantine, closing the digital divide becomes central to our collective safety and economic security. The time to close that divide with the same sense of urgency we must summon to fight this pandemic is now. To that end, I voted before this meeting

¹ Department of Labor, Unemployment Insurance Weekly Claims, News Release (March 26, 2020), available at <https://www.dol.gov/ui/data.pdf>. This figure surpasses the previous record of 695,000, set in 1982. *Id.*

² Geoffrey Starks, "To Fight Coronavirus, Millions More Americans Need Internet Access," N.Y. Times (March 19, 2020).

to approve the COVID-19 Emergency Telehealth Support Program and the Telehealth for Low-Income Consumers item.

Saving lives and saving the economy are not in conflict right now, and by all credible experts, it is clear that to avoid the pandemic accelerating beyond the capacity of our health care system, social distancing and quarantining will remain America's best path forward for several weeks to come. Digital connectivity will remain the safest way to telework, access medical information, look for jobs, and help our next generation learn while school is closed. We must connect all Americans as soon as possible, and by working together to quickly increase access to broadband, the technology and telecommunications sectors can ensure that all Americans who need treatment can seek it safely and those who need to be at home can effectively stay there.

Finally, the impact of the coronavirus has reached almost every human on the globe, but it has also affected each of us in our own deeply personal ways. My heart aches, but I have of course also seen up close the resiliency and goodness of the human spirit, especially here in America. I want to express my thanks and strong support to the FCC family of employees and contractors during this difficult time. I continue to be impressed by the dedication and hard work of my colleagues, and I look forward to returning to work together after this crisis has passed."

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