

**REMARKS OF  
COMMISSIONER JESSICA ROSENWORCEL  
#RIGHT2CONNECT TOWNHALL  
WASHINGTON, DC  
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Good afternoon. Thank you for having me here today. I'm honored to join MediaJustice and my colleague Commissioner Starks to shine a spotlight on why we all need to stay connected during this crisis.

This crisis is exposing a hard truth about the state of the digital divide in urban America, rural America, and everything in between. Not everyone in this country is connected to modern communications. Not everyone in this country has access to broadband. And not everyone in this country has access to basic phone service.

But here's another truth: Everyone needs communications to have a fair shot at 21<sup>st</sup> century success. It was true before this crisis. But it's even clearer now. Because staying connected means you have a fighting chance at maintaining some semblance of normal life in this crisis. Because this cruel pandemic has compelled us as a nation to call, connect, and head online for life like never before.

But there are a lot of people at risk of losing that connection right now. This morning, the Department of Labor announced that 5.2 million people filed for unemployment benefits last week. That's on top of the 6.6 million who filed the week before last. And 6.8 million the week before that. And another 3.3 million the week before that. Do the math. That is nearly 22 million souls without work in a single month.

That's tragic. Over the weekend, 10,000 cars lined up before dawn seeking food from the San Antonio Food Bank. The images are chilling. And the pandemic's toll is manifesting in other ways, too. Businesses are boarded up. Schools are shuttered. We've got a thing called Parking-Lot Wi-Fi right now because so many kids struggling with the Homework Gap are sitting in cars wherever they can find a free wireless signal to connect to class. Calls to police reporting domestic abuse have surged. All of these are stark reminders that this virus is damaging so many lives and livelihoods.

As this virus places new strains on our economy and households across the country, we need to double down on our efforts to make sure no one is left behind when it comes to communications.

The Federal Communications Commission can help. If it leads with its humanity. And if it commits to modernizing the Lifeline program to meet this moment.

That means that the FCC recognizes the numbers I just mentioned and coordinates with the officials taking in so many new unemployment claims. Because every one of those individuals who have lost jobs in this crisis should not also lose access to communications.

That also means keeping Lifeline standards up to date. Right now for mobile service they support 1000 voice minutes or 3 Gigabytes of data on a 3G connection. As a group on Capitol Hill led by Senator Blumenthal said this week, that sounds like 2010, not 2020. We need to do better. While we're at it need to explore how this framework can be expanded with an Emergency Broadband Service, a discussion that is underway on Capitol Hill.

It also means making sure no one is cut off from communications in this crisis. And on this last point the FCC has already committed to pausing recertification and reverification and other things that could result in shutting down service. But to be meaningful those commitments need monitoring. Because again, no one shut be cut off in this crisis.

These things are possible. They are doable. How do I know? Because the FCC led with humanity in its Lifeline efforts in a crisis more than a decade ago. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina the FCC modernized the program to help those displaced by brutal weather and rising water get access to wireless communications and rebuild their lives.

We led with our humanity. Let's do it again. Let's make sure that during this devastating crisis communications is available for all.

Let me close by pointing out another injustice out there that needs the attention of the FCC. That's the cruel rates the families of the incarcerated pay to stay in touch with their loved ones. Those rates were unfair before this crisis but now with in-person visits impossible, they are not fair, not right, and they need a fix—just as Senator Duckworth and so many others told the FCC in a letter this week.

So there are a lot of wrongs to right. But I'm optimistic because fixing these things are within our power. Let's do them. Let's make it happen.

Thank you.