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For Immediate Release**COMMISSIONER GEOFFREY STARKS
APPLAUDS BROADBAND FUNDING IN COVID-19 RELIEF LEGISLATION**

WASHINGTON, December 21, 2020—This evening, both houses of Congress passed omnibus appropriations and emergency coronavirus relief legislation, which provides \$7 billion for broadband internet access. That funding will cover a new \$3.2 billion emergency broadband benefit for low-income families; grants for Tribal broadband programs, telehealth, and rural broadband deployment; a pilot program for broadband around historically Black colleges and universities; broadband mapping; and the funding for removing untrustworthy Huawei and ZTE equipment from our networks. In response, Commissioner Starks issued the following statement:

“With widespread vaccination on the horizon, we have so much to be thankful for this holiday season. But many Americans have struggled during this pandemic, including the tens of millions of Americans without broadband. The digital divide has morphed into the COVID-19 divide. For too many families, that means missing out on work and opportunities, using Wi-Fi in parking lots to complete schoolwork, traveling to in-person medical visits instead of using telehealth, and missing connections with friends and family.

“Low-income Americans, Tribal communities, and communities of color have borne those burdens disproportionately. That’s why I am pleased that this legislation prioritizes connecting these households. In recent years, many policymakers have focused on rural access as the key to curbing the digital divide. But we know that tens of millions of Americans do not have broadband simply because they cannot afford it. No family should have to decide between keeping the lights on or getting the household connected. I have long called on the FCC to focus on affordability, and I am committed to ensuring that this emergency broadband benefit quickly reaches the families that need it most.

“The bill also takes important steps towards expanding critical broadband access across Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), other Minority Serving Institutions, and their surrounding communities. These institutions are the cornerstones of our nation’s communities of color, including Black communities in the rural South. When I convened an HBCU Presidents’ Roundtable in May 2020, eight leaders from HBCUs across the nation told me of their need for equitable investments in the digital age to ensure they can continue empowering their students, their faculty, and the towns they serve. I am glad that Congress has responded.

“Finally, as we look ahead, we must recognize that internet inequality held millions of Americans back from their full potential long before COVID-19. There is more work to do to bring affordable broadband to everyone—now and after we’ve put this crisis behind us.”

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