

**REMARKS OF  
ACTING CHAIRWOMAN JESSICA ROSENWORCEL  
EMERGENCY BROADBAND BENEFIT ROUNDTABLE  
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON, DC  
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Good morning. Thank you all for joining us and a special thank you to our distinguished panelists. We've got a terrific group of experts assembled today, and I know you will have a thoughtful and constructive discussion. I also want to thank each of my fellow Commissioners for joining us. It's a demonstration that this agency is united in its interest in carrying out our statutory duties efficiently and effectively.

The Federal Communications Commission has a history of doing just that. In fact, earlier this week we celebrated the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Telecommunications Act, which required the agency to hold dozens of proceedings in short order, including those that planted the seeds for our present universal service programs. This agency led the country through a digital television transition. We were responsible for the world's first-of-its-kind broadcast incentive auction. When we set our mind to it, we can accomplish big things.

That brings me to the here and now. We are working our way out of a pandemic that has upended life across the country. As a nation, we have been asked to move so much of our day to day activity online. Work, education, healthcare, and more. It's more apparent than ever that broadband is no longer nice-to-have. It's need-to-have. For everyone, everywhere.

To help make this happen, late last year Congress directed this agency to establish a new Emergency Broadband Benefit. It will expand access to high-speed connections and offer a new way to connect for those struggling in this pandemic and ongoing economic crisis.

Specifically, Congress provided \$3.2 billion for the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program, which will provide discounts of up to \$50 a month for internet service, and up to \$75 on Tribal Lands. It will also provide eligible consumers an opportunity to receive a discount on a computer or tablet.

I believe in the urgency of now. We are stronger when we are all connected and this program is a powerful way to help make it happen. So we need to make the hard choices that are required and get it up and running. This means outreach efforts not only by this agency but also by all of our partners in this program and everyone represented here today. It means policies that encourage robust participation by providers. It means wrestling with the privacy challenges under the law. And it means making sure that participants have clear and easy-to-follow rules of the road.

This is worth the effort. That's because we know the cost of broadband is a hardship for many families, especially during the ongoing crisis when so many are facing economic strain. According to the Pew Research Center, one-third of broadband users report they fear not being able to afford service during this pandemic. We need a program that responds to these concerns and is open to every eligible household. With so much of modern life now dependent on internet

access, no one should have to choose between paying a broadband bill and paying rent or putting food on the table.

But we know this kind of thing is happening. In the *Washington Post* this week, there was an article that began with the story of Eboni Winford. She's a psychologist at a clinic in East Knoxville, Tennessee. Her work in this underserved and predominantly Black community has mostly moved online. But for so many of her patients, reliable access to the internet is not a given. If they had access at all, it was typically on a smartphone. Their time with her was limited and precious. She said she started learning her patients' renewal schedules, so she could set up an appointment without fear that she'd lose access to those she was supposed to help. She described how one woman had to cancel an appointment after exhausting her plan. She had used it up planning her brother's funeral after he passed away—from COVID-19.

We need to fix this. We need to address these digital deficiencies that are holding her patients and too many people in too many places back. The Emergency Broadband Benefit can help. It's a program that Congress pulled together fast, and this agency now needs to make the hard choices required to provide relief fast. We welcome your input on how to do it. In fact, we need it. I know everyone here is up for it, full of ideas, and eager to help. I'm grateful for it. So now let's get to work.