

**STATEMENT OF
ACTING CHAIRWOMAN JESSICA ROSENWORCEL**

Re: *Open Meeting Presentations on the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program, the COVID-19 Telehealth Program, and the FCC's Digital Opportunity Data Collection and Mapping Initiatives* (February 17, 2021)

This is my first meeting serving as the Acting Chairwoman of the Federal Communications Commission. I thank the President for the opportunity to lead this agency and its uncommonly talented staff. It is a privilege and important responsibility because we have work to do to expand the reach of communications so that the benefits of the digital age reach everyone, everywhere in this country.

That work begins today with the priorities for this agency laid out last year in legislation known as the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021. In it, Congress directed the FCC to establish a new Emergency Broadband Benefit, expand its COVID-19 telehealth initiatives, and to get going on a project to map where broadband is and is not all across the country.

These are three big tasks.

First, 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, Congress directed this agency to establish a new Emergency Broadband Benefit Program. 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 a month on Tribal Lands. It also will 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. 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.

Congress has recognized this urgency and required us to act with speed, providing us 60 days to write the rules for this program. We must act decisively and will need to make hard choices along the way. In order to meet this mark, this program must be expansive, inclusive, and transparent. I want to thank all of the stakeholders who have been so active in this

proceeding, who have shared their good ideas and advice, and I especially appreciate those generous participants in last week's roundtable where we discussed the importance of outreach, awareness, competition, and consumer choice. We need to make the most of this shared interest and reach out to local organizations, national organizations, schools, faith-based institutions, and others with the desire to help. So right here, right now, let me invite each of my colleagues to advance our outreach efforts and provide their ideas for partnership organizations. Together, I know we can make this program a success.

Second, during the last year our nation's healthcare providers—the hospitals, the clinics, and the heroic staff who run those institutions—have been on the frontlines battling this cruel pandemic. They deserve our gratitude, our prayers, and every possible tool we can provide them to make their efforts a success.

For this reason, my first outings as Acting Chairwoman were visits with healthcare providers using telemedicine to extend the reach of their care to more patients in more places. Commissioner Carr and I spent time at Whitman-Walker Health, a clinic with a storied history of providing health and wellness services, especially for the LGBTQ community. We learned how they are expanding access to care using new technologies, but we also learned how old models of reimbursement and state-by-state licensing can hold telemedicine back.

Next, Commissioner Starks and I held a meeting with staff from the University of Virginia Center for Telehealth, led by Dr. Karen Rheuban, who was an early evangelist on the power of telemedicine and is one of its foremost practitioners today. Moreover, where she works is the beneficiary of a recent grant from our Connected Care Pilot Program and her team was eager to show how telehealth can make a meaningful difference for rural Virginians, including those suffering from strokes and those seeking access to maternal care.

Then at Children's National Hospital in Washington, Commissioner Simington and I witnessed state-of-the-art digital health care technology—supported by the FCC—that has improved provider-to-patient pediatric care across the region. But more than that, we were able to peer into the future of telehealth with practitioners describing how connectivity and data analytics would in time morph into new opportunities for care.

Every visit was eye opening. Every discussion was exciting. But more exciting still is that following last year's \$200 million grant program to boost telemedicine during the pandemic, Congress has provided the FCC with an additional \$250 million to further extend its reach. That means we can help do more good by expanding access to these technologies to assist with healthcare during this crisis—and beyond.

Third, and finally, we have mapping. It is no secret that the FCC's existing broadband maps leave a lot to be desired. We can do better—and we will. Because now Congress has not only passed the Broadband DATA Act directing the agency to update its data collection practices for its maps, it has provided us with funding to carry out this task. This is good news. It is the first step towards better broadband policy by providing us with the information we need to reach everyone, everywhere in this country with high-speed service—100 percent. This is going to

require an all-hands effort at the agency, with expertise from multiple bureaus and offices. It is going to require not just data from carriers but input from consumers and state, local, and Tribal governments who know what is happening on the ground, where they live. To get this done I have decided we need to use the same structure used in another big effort at this agency—the first-of-its-kind wireless Incentive Auction Task Force. So today I am announcing that I have appointed Jean Kiddoo—who worked on that last effort—to lead the Broadband Data Task Force. She has a history of pulling off complicated projects and making it look easy. I know she will do a great job and I will make sure this agency provides her with every resource she needs to do so.