

**REMARKS OF
ACTING CHAIRWOMAN JESSICA ROSENWORCEL
“BRIDGING DIGITAL DIVIDES”
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Good morning! It’s such an honor to join so many high-level representatives from the WSIS stakeholder community.

As Acting Chairwoman of the Federal Communications Commission, I believe that the future belongs to the connected. No matter who you are or where you live you need access to modern communications to have a fair shot at 21st century success.

Of course, nothing has demonstrated the importance of connectivity like the ongoing pandemic. As a global community we need connections—physical and digital—that strengthen our mutual bonds. We need communications that reach all and help us work, learn, be informed, enlightened, and entertained. And we need connections that can break down barriers that for too long have held too many back.

So thank you to my distinguished peers for sharing their experiences. Today we are learning that there are so many aspects to the digital divide. But I’d like to bring laser-like focus on one of them: what I call the Homework Gap.

When I was growing up, homework required nothing more than your siblings leaving you alone and a Number 2 pencil.

Those days are gone. Because now internet access is required.

The best evidence of this is this past school year. In the United States, many schools shutdown part-time or full-time and reverted to remote learning. What this means is that students were told to head online to class. But students without internet access at home are locked out of this virtual classroom.

This is happening all over the world. So let’s do the math. In the United States, our data shows that as many as 16.9 million children in my country alone fall into the Homework Gap. According to a report commissioned by the United Nations Children’s Fund and the International Telecommunication Union, 2.2 billion—or 67 percent of children around the world—lack internet access at home.

I believe this is the cruelest part of the digital divide. We need to make it a priority to fix this Homework Gap and connect every student so they can have a fair shot at continuing their education.

So let me share three things we are doing in the United States to help fix this. First, we have launched an Emergency Broadband Benefit to help families struggling to pay for internet service during the pandemic. This new program will connect more families to jobs, healthcare services, and virtual classrooms. Our program provides a discount of up to \$50 per month toward broadband service and up to \$75 per month on Tribal lands. Families also can receive discounts to purchase computers and other equipment to connect them to the internet.

Second, we are expanding our federal programs to connect schools and libraries to broadband. Specifically, in the coming weeks the FCC will adopt new rules that will help provide schools with Wi-Fi hotspots and other connectivity solutions to help students who lack reliable internet access at home.

Third and finally, we are taking action to better understand the scope of our national broadband deployment challenges. After all, we cannot manage problems we do not measure. So one of my first actions as Acting Chairwoman was to stand up a Broadband Data Task Force to help us build the most accurate, up-to-date maps of where broadband service is offered throughout the country. This will make sure that our efforts to bridge the digital divide are focused in the right places and making a difference. I look forward to sharing more about what we learn from this effort soon.

This pandemic has taught us like nothing before that broadband is no longer a nice to have, it's a need to have, for everyone, everywhere. That's especially true when it comes to students trying to keep up in classes that have gone virtual.

Thank you.