

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER GEOFFREY STARKS
FIELD HEARING ON HURRICANE IDA AND NETWORK RESILIENCE
OCTOBER 26, 2021**

Re: *Resilient Networks*, PS Docket No. 21-346; *Amendments to Part 4 of the Commission's Rules Concerning Disruptions to Communications*, PS Docket No. 15-80; *New Part 4 of the Commission's Rules Concerning Disruptions to Communications*, ET Docket No. 04-35

Thank you to Acting Chairwoman Rosenworcel and the Commission's staff for organizing today's hearing on a critical topic: disaster preparation and resiliency in our communications networks. Last month, we voted unanimously to begin a comprehensive inquiry on these urgent and important issues. I'm glad we are hearing testimony today from experts who will help us learn from recent emergencies and plan the Commission's next steps in the work of keeping Americans connected during emergencies and speeding the restoration of networks when the danger has passed. When I last held a Field Hearing on this same topic in Puerto Rico in response to Hurricanes Irma and Maria, as well as the earthquakes there, I learned a tremendous amount on both a personal and policy level.

Preparing our communications networks to withstand disasters has never been more important. The consequences of climate change are coming into sharper focus every season. Hurricane Ida—just the most recent of the serious storms to hit the United States this year—was the second most intense and damaging hurricane to ever make landfall in Louisiana. I applaud the efforts of the Louisiana Emergency Operations Center working alongside federal partners on the ground in responding to the storm. I also want to thank the many responders who worked tirelessly to restore networks after Hurricane Ida made landfall, as well as the Louisiana Association of Broadcasters for communicating any unmet fuel, communications, and power needs of state broadcasters to Commission personnel. Quick action by local, state, and federal governments and cooperating private actors undoubtedly saved lives. We recognize your dedicated work under trying conditions. At the same time, we know that in the storm's aftermath, many people were cut off from communications at a time of great anxiety. I am hopeful that this hearing and the public comment process, along with the extensive investigation conducted by our staff, will lead to concrete steps toward preventing outages and, when they occur, getting Americans reconnected faster.

Those steps are, to be sure, an essential part of the Commission's duty to protect public safety. But they are also critical to our digital equity and inclusion work. Recent studies, including one by the Environmental Protection Agency, highlight the disproportionate impact climate change will have—and is already having—on vulnerable Americans. These include people of color and the low-income, Americans who are disproportionately likely to find themselves on the wrong side of the digital divide. They are counting on us to get this right. We will not have equal access to modern communications without improving network resiliency, and I look forward to hearing from our panelists about how investing in resiliency can advance our digital equity goals. Thank you for sharing your experience and expertise with us.