

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER GEOFFREY STARKS**

Re: *Implementing the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act: Prevention and Elimination of Digital Discrimination*, GN Docket No. 22-69, Notice of Inquiry (March 16, 2022).

Certain forms of discrimination in the United States have an established history, context, and pattern. “Digital discrimination,” in contrast, is not as well defined. In fact, Congress has given this agency the heavy task of outlining and understanding its root causes, and ultimately implementing rules necessary to prevent and eliminate digital discrimination based on income level, race, ethnicity, color, religion, or national origin. The Notice of Inquiry we adopt today is the start.

While we are laying a foundation for rules preventing and eliminating digital discrimination, we must remember the people who are counting on us to get this right. For millions of vulnerable Americans, the lived experience of digital discrimination can take many forms. It could mean struggling to find basic connectivity while wealthier neighborhoods across town get faster and faster service. It could mean living in an apartment building some providers won’t serve, even as they wire buildings down the street. But one thing is clear: these Americans intuitively feel that something is not right.

Digital discrimination has consequences. Just last week, I met with a group of Public Housing Authorities who are working to close the digital divide in their communities. They talked about the transformative impact broadband has had in their communities, bringing with it economic, educational, and social opportunities that every American should have. And where the promise of broadband remains unfulfilled, too many of our neighbors remain on the outside looking in—knowing they are missing out on connections that would improve their lives. Today, we begin the hard work needed to change that.

I thank Chairwoman Rosenworcel and my colleagues for incorporating my suggestions into this item. In particular, we will seek comment about making our complaint process accessible to those who have been directly harmed by these practices. To effectively prevent and eliminate digital discrimination, we will need the public’s help. Digital discrimination, and the disconnection it causes, is particularly insidious because it robs its victims of many of the tools to do something about it. Our complaint processes must be straightforward, transparent, well publicized, and easily accessible to those with poor or no connectivity.

I am grateful to the many congressional leaders, particularly Congresswoman Yvette Clarke, who championed this issue and positioned the FCC to take action, as well as the Commission staff who prepared today’s Notice. It has my full support, and I look forward to reviewing a robust record.