

**STATEMENT OF COMMISSIONER GEOFFREY STARKS
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION**

**BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS & TECHNOLOGY
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY & COMMERCE
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**CONNECTING AMERICA: OVERSIGHT OF THE FCC
WASHINGTON, DC**

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Chairman Doyle, Ranking Member Latta, Chairman Pallone, Ranking Member McMorris Rodgers, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

We stand at an inflection point in history. First, the COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally transformed the way we work, learn, and connect to each other. Second, the challenges of our day make clear that network security has never been more important. And finally, the consequences of climate change are becoming alarmingly clear. The FCC has an indispensable role to play on each of these fronts, and it is more evident than ever before that our policies intersect with our nation's highest priorities. For my part, I am proud to say that we are helping make America more equitable, secure, and sustainable.

When I last spoke with this subcommittee, I noted how our long-standing digital divide had morphed into a monstrous COVID-19 divide. And like so many other aspects of the pandemic, the lack of access to and adoption of home broadband has amplified and reinforced existing inequities in our society. In particular, Americans of color remain, by a wide margin, less likely to have a home broadband connection than their counterparts. The Pew Research Center has found that 29 percent of Black adults and 35 percent of Latinx adults do not have a home broadband connection.

We must meet the disconnected where they are. For tens of millions of Americans, the price is just too high. A recent study by Education Superhighway found that 18.1 million households, home to 47 million people, remain offline simply because they cannot afford an internet connection. Millions more have made difficult sacrifices to keep their broadband service. No family should have to choose between keeping the lights on and a broadband connection, but we know that they do.

The Affordable Connectivity Program is changing that. Congress and President Biden have made a \$14.2 billion investment in affordability that converted the Emergency Broadband Benefit from a pandemic-focused effort into a long-term part of the FCC's work. In setting up ACP, the FCC announced many steps to continue increasing participation in the program. I want to highlight one of the places where I will focus my efforts. The Chairwoman, along with my colleagues, supported my proposal to seek comment on a Pilot Program to expand participation by households that benefit from Federal Public Housing Assistance (FPHA). More than 5

million households benefit from federal rental assistance programs, including public housing and the housing choice voucher program (Section 8). There is a clear synergy between housing and connectivity; if we are helping a family secure housing, we should be able to help them secure an online connection. I've met with a number of Public Housing Authorities already to seek their expertise in closing the digital divide, and I'll never forget when I got to sit down with a single mother of three in Selma, Alabama who told me how free connectivity in her residence at the George Washington Carver Homes transformed her life. I know it can do the same for others.

As we increase access to broadband networks, we must also ensure that those networks are secure. I'm particularly proud of the work we've done to remove untrustworthy equipment from our telecom networks. Back in 2019, I called for a concerted effort to identify such equipment and devise a plan to rip and replace it with secure devices—"Find It, Fix It, Fund It." With Congress's support, we've developed a program to achieve this goal and have received over 180 applications seeking funding for this effort, at a potential cost of \$5.6 billion. We should give these applications a close look, and I look forward to working with Congress to ensure there is enough funding to remove and replace all the untrustworthy equipment.

2019 was also the year we began to ban untrustworthy carriers from U.S. networks. In the last 3 years, we've either denied or revoked telecom operating authority for every carrier identified by Team Telecom as a national security risk, including our decision two weeks ago to revoke the authority of two Chinese carriers. These actions have strengthened our national security, but our work is not complete. Even as we have barred Chinese carriers from offering telecom services in the United States, some of them continue to market data center and private line services that allow them access to U.S. communications and the personal information of American citizens.

On that issue, I have called for the Commission to work with Congress and the Administration to examine how to tackle network security threats like foreign-owned data centers. In cooperation with the relevant Executive Branch agencies, the Commission should commence an inquiry to: (1) identify all U.S.-based data centers owned and/or operated by companies subject to the laws or jurisdiction of adversary states; (2) identify, on a confidential basis, the services provided by these data centers and their customers; (3) ascertain whether the data centers present a risk of interception, tampering, or blocking of U.S. communications and information; and (4) identify any legal authority of the FCC or another regulatory body to protect U.S. communications stored within or that otherwise transit these data centers.

For example, Executive Order 13873 delegates authority to the Department of Commerce over transactions involving information and communications technology that pose a national security risk to the United States. The Commission also might have oversight through its licensing authority for undersea cable landing sites, given that these data centers, as well as those overseas, rely on such cables to transmit information between the U.S. and the rest of the world.

Finally, I must address another issue that will define our shared future—the environment—and the important role I see the telecommunications and technology sector playing. Here are four ways to drive impact. First, we must continue to optimize the efficient use of spectrum—a finite resource—while at the same time enabling devices that draw less power. Spectral efficiency and saving energy are a must-have – doing more while using less. Second, 5G and other advanced networks are also enabling use cases that could dramatically increase sustainability. 5G use cases in just the manufacturing, precision-agriculture and energy sectors

could contribute approximately 20 percent towards US emissions reduction targets by 2025. Third, public-private partnerships are already hard at work, and more will be expected. For example, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act includes \$500 million in DOT awards to support the ongoing efforts by smart cities to use wireless IoT sensors to reduce traffic congestion and energy usage. Fourth, industry-led initiatives will continue to play a significant role, from their progress towards reducing or eliminating the carbon emissions associated with their operations, increasing the use of renewable energy, and minimizing electronic waste. Here's the point: we have long spoken about the economic benefits of 5G; we must also put time, thought and attention to maximizing 5G's environmental benefits.

The world is undergoing transformative change and communications networks have a critical role to play. The FCC must take the actions necessary to achieve a level playing field for all, protect the security of our nation, and preserve the health of our planet.

Thank you again for inviting me today, and I look forward to your questions.