

**STATEMENT OF
CHAIRWOMAN JESSICA ROSENWORCEL**

Re: *Schools and Libraries Universal Support Mechanism*, CC Docket No. 02-6; *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, CC Docket No. 96-45; *Changes to the Board of Directors of the National Exchange Carrier Association, Inc.*, CC Docket No. 97-21, Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (July 20, 2023).

Last December, I drove west from Albuquerque to the Pueblo of Laguna. I visited the Tribal library. When I was there, tarps and plastic sheeting covered the bookshelves and computers. This space, which the library aide assured me was usually bright and warm, was damp and drafty due to water damage. But repairs were underway. The same library aide explained just how vital it was to fix this facility. In a typical year 20,000 patrons visit the library and hold more than 10,000 internet sessions. For so many people in this rural community, this Tribal library was how they connect to the larger world.

What stayed with me most from this visit, however, was a binder on a shelf by the desk of the head librarian. It was bulky. It was chock-filled with papers and forms. It was labeled “E-Rate.”

The binder made clear what conversation alone did not. Tribal libraries like this one are working—with so many constraints—to figure out how to get support for broadband connections they know their patrons need. But navigating the program is not easy for so many of the facilities that need it most.

This was a theme that came up again and again during the Tribal Libraries Tour that the Office of Native Affairs and Policy recently held. It included discussions and visits with Alaska Native Communities and the Morongo Band of Mission Indians as well as listening sessions with representatives from nearly two dozen Tribes.

Now we are acting on what we heard and what I saw that day at the library in the Pueblo of Laguna. We are taking steps to make it easier for Tribal Libraries to participate in the E-Rate program. Remember these are facilities in some of the most remote areas, where broadband is scarce and community access at the library is essential. So we are cleaning up our rules and streamlining our process so that more Tribal libraries can seek support through E-Rate. To this end, we expand eligibility for more Tribal facilities. We simplify forms and procedures.

On top of this, I am pleased to announce we are extending our existing Tribal Libraries Pilot Program for an additional funding year. This program, which offers Tribal libraries one-on-one assistance navigating the E-Rate application process, has been well-received and we believe it can help more Tribal libraries in more places. But the benefits flow in two directions. Because along the way, we can learn more about what in our rules impedes small libraries in Native communities from participating.

For this effort, and for coordinating our engagement with Tribes and developing the Tribal Libraries Tour, I want to thank Bambi Kraus, who leads our Office of Native Affairs and Policy. I also want to thank Max Atkins, Callie Coker, Kate Dumouchel, Jodie Griffin, Trent Harkrader, Sue McNeil, Molly O’Conor, Johnny Roddy, Johnnay Schrieber, Hayley Steffen, and Lisa Zaina from the Wireline Competition Bureau; Edyael Casaperalta, Lloyd Collier, Derik Goatson, Alejandro Roark, Jill Springer, and Cara Voth from the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau; Malena Barzilai, Michele Ellison, Richard Mallen, William Richardson, Anjali Singh, and Chin Yoo from the Office of General Counsel; Warren Firschein, Eugene Kiselev, and Shane Taylor from the Office of Economics and Analytics; Daniel Daly from the Office of the Managing Director; and Michael Gussow, Joycelyn James, Joy Ragsdale, and Chana Wilkerson from the Office of Communications Business Opportunities.