

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER BRENDAN CARR**

Re: *Broadband Connectivity and Maternal Health — Implementation of the Data Mapping to Save Moms' Lives Act*, GN Docket No. 23-309, Notice of Inquiry (October 19, 2023)

Rockbridge County, Virginia, sits right in the middle of the Shenandoah Valley. The Allegheny Mountains run just to its west and the Blue Ridge Mountains to its east. The 9,000 or so households in the county are spread across its 601 square miles of forests, fields, and foothills. Even though I-81 and I-64 both run through the county, it is not immune from the health care challenges that are afflicting so many rural areas. One of those challenges is limited access to neo-natal care and thus long drives and limited options for pregnant women, making high-risk pregnancies even more difficult.

In July of 2019, I had the privilege of visiting a maternal health care unit at the Rockbridge Area Health Center. This Federally Qualified Health Center provides primary care services in a medically underserved rural community, including telehealth and remote patient monitoring services. During my visit, I heard first-hand the challenges of high-risk pregnancies in rural communities due to limited maternal care support, highlighting the need for innovative healthcare in underserved regions.

This is where telehealth technology is making a difference and providing life-changing access to specialty care without requiring moms-to-be to travel long distances, especially for those who face risks and challenges during pregnancy. One remarkable aspect of telehealth is the ability of devices that can track vital signs and fetal activity and send data to expert healthcare providers in real-time. This proactive approach enables early identification of complications, potentially saving lives and reducing the burden on mothers and families. Furthermore, telehealth platforms can also provide crucial access to perinatal mental health services, a facet of maternal care that is often overlooked for mothers.

Programs like these are why I launched the Connected Care Pilot Program, which is designed to support telehealth and telemedicine programs for underserved populations. Indeed, the Pilot has funded over two dozen maternal health programs like the one I visited in Rockbridge County.

At the FCC, we can play our part by helping ensure that expectant and post-partum mothers receive the care they need, regardless of their geographical location. The integration of data to gain a deeper understanding of the nexus between broadband access and maternal health is critical. The FCC's Mapping and Broadband Health in America platform will help enable further insight into maternal mortality and morbidity rates as it relates to broadband access, and I am glad that the NOI before us seeks comment on ways to improve upon that platform.

I want to extend a special thanks to Chairwoman Rosenworcel for her leadership and commitment to advancing the interests of maternal health. And, finally, I want to thank the staff of the Office of General Counsel and the Wireline Competition Bureau for their work on these important issues. The item has my support.