

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER GEOFFREY STARKS**

Re: *Modernizing the E-Rate Program for Schools and Libraries*, WC Docket No 13-184, Declaratory Ruling (October 19, 2023).

For some students their school day starts well before the first bell. They catch the bus early, before the sun rises, and board the school bus to start their long commute to school. It's been a longstanding way of life, in particular, for many rural and Tribal students. Indeed, all the way back in 2004, the New York Times published an article about Navajo students who had a four hour bus commute to school.¹ The same article, citing a survey of elementary school principals, found that it was common for rural children to spend 90 minutes on buses getting to school.²

Take my home state of Kansas. It's a big state where farms stretch for miles, and often in the more rural parts of the state, you can't even see your neighbor. So when it's time for school, students who catch the bus frequently have a long road ahead of them. But what if we could do more. Thanks to advances in connectivity, students now could be using this time to and from school productively – to study, learn, and do their homework. This time could be especially valuable when you consider that many of those same students may lack quality broadband at home.

And there is precedent for supporting connectivity on school buses. For example, back in 2003, the Commission determined a school bus driver's use of wireless telecommunications services while delivering children to and from school was eligible for E-Rate support.³ If we are supporting the driver's use of connectivity, it is past time that we offer the benefit to students on the same bus.

I support this item and thank the Commission staff for their hard work.

¹ Sam Dillon, *In Rural Utah, Students' School Day Stretches to 12 Hours (With 4 on the Bus)*, New York Times (May 28, 2004), <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/28/us/in-rural-utah-students-school-day-stretches-to-12-hours-with-4-on-the-bus.html>.

² *Id.*

³ *Schools and Libraries Universal Service Support Mechanism*, CC Docket No. 02-6, Second Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 18 FCC Rcd 9202, 9208-9, para. 19 (2003).