

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER ANNA M. GOMEZ**

Re: *Safeguarding and Securing the Open Internet*, WC Docket No. 23-320, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (October 19, 2023).

Today's world depends so much on being connected. Broadband access to the Internet is not only a vital tool for education, health care, and communicating with loved ones; it is a critical conduit that is essential for modern life. As a country, we have recognized the significant importance of connectivity and have made a historic investment in broadband for all. And at the same time, at a national level, we do not have a regulatory framework to ensure that this critical conduit remains accessible and secure.

I want to be very clear about what we are considering. Today, we are opening a proceeding to seek public comment about how best to safeguard and secure broadband infrastructure, protect consumers, and ensure that the Internet remains open and available to all content providers and consumers. We propose to align the ongoing historic federal investment in broadband deployment with policies that will protect the openness and integrity of these same networks. This proceeding is not about controlling Internet content. It is not about stifling investment, regulating rates, or reducing competition. It is not about controlling the Internet.

Instead, the proposed net neutrality rules will ensure that access to the Internet remains open, so that all viewpoints—including ones with which I disagree—are heard, without discrimination. More so, these principles protect consumers while also maintaining a healthy competitive broadband Internet ecosystem, because we know that competition is required for access to a healthy, open Internet that is accessible for all.

Our goal is to implement this framework in a way that continues to encourage the massive investment in broadband we saw while net neutrality policies were in place prior to 2017 and the continued massive investment in broadband we saw while net neutrality rules remained in place after 2017, as states implemented a patchwork of rules in response to the elimination of federal protections. As we are pursuing re-establishing these rules, we must also be cognizant of the potential effects on Internet Service Providers, especially smaller Internet Service Providers. Many of these providers play a crucial role in fostering competition, especially in underserved and rural areas. We must make sure that net neutrality rules do not place an undue burden on these smaller providers while still upholding the core principles of an open Internet. I welcome their feedback in this proceeding.

Most importantly, we must prioritize consumers. We must pay attention to communities who have been historically left on the wrong side of the digital divide. While we all risk to lose out by not taking action to ensure that we have proper guardrails in place, it is historically underserved communities who risk to lose the most.

I look forward to a substantial record developing, and listening to consumers and stakeholders on the best approaches to keep the critical resource of the Internet open and accessible for all. Thank you to the staff throughout the agency for their work on this item, and to the Wireline Competition Bureau for leading the drafting efforts.