

**Media Contact:**

Katie Gorscak  
katie.gorscak@fcc.gov

**For Immediate Release****FCC KICKS OFF RULEMAKING TO EXPLORE INNOVATIVE WAYS  
TO CONTINUE TO ADDRESS ALASKA'S UNIQUE CONNECTIVITY  
CHALLENGES*****Commission Also Adopts Rules to Improve Efficiency of High-Cost Universal  
Service Program***

WASHINGTON, October 19, 2023—Today, the Federal Communications Commission voted to kick off a rulemaking to explore how the universal service high-cost support program can continue funding fixed and mobile broadband services in Alaska—one of the hardest to serve areas in the country.

Connecting everyone, everywhere in the most sparsely populated state demands an innovative funding approach due to many challenges unique to Alaska, including the rugged terrain and cold climate. In 2016, the Commission developed the 10-year Alaska plan to address Alaska's fixed and mobile connectivity needs. Support for high-cost fixed service in Alaska is also provided through two other programs and is scheduled to wind-down in the next few years.

The Notice of Proposed Rulemaking adopted today initiates a rulemaking seeking comment on a number of issues to help the Commission determine the most effective methodologies and uses for future universal service funding for high-cost fixed and mobile services in Alaska. As part of the rulemaking, the Commission will leverage data from the agency's new and improved broadband coverage map and broadband funding map, which provide a more accurate picture of where service is and is not, and where deployment has already been funded, in Alaska. The Commission also seeks comment to better understand the changes, including technology and the broadband funding landscape, that have occurred in Alaska since 2016.

In addition to the rulemaking, the Report and Order adopted today makes several administrative modifications to, and clarifications of, Commission rules to improve the administration of the high-cost program. Among other changes, the Report and Order changes provider annual reporting and certification obligations, streamlines processes governing mergers between rate-of-return local exchange carriers, and makes several rule modifications to improve Commission oversight, including increased performance testing reporting, elimination of waiver exceptions for study area boundary changes, and a new notice requirement for carriers relinquishing their Eligible Telecommunications Carrier (ETC) designations before state authorities.

Action by the Commission October 19, 2023 by Notice of Proposed Rulemaking and Report and Order (FCC 23-87). Chairwoman Rosenworcel, Commissioners Carr, Starks, Simington,

and Gomez approving. Chairwoman Rosenworcel, Commissioners Starks, and Gomez issuing separate statements.

WC Docket Nos. 10-90, 14-58, 23-328, 09-197; WT Docket No. 10-208

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*This is an unofficial announcement of Commission action. Release of the full text of a Commission order constitutes official action. See MCI v. FCC, 515 F.2d 385 (D.C. Cir. 1974).*