

**REMARKS OF
CHAIRWOMAN JESSICA ROSENWORCEL
2023 NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
WASHINGTON, DC
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Good evening. It is an honor to be with you tonight as you begin your conference here in the Nation's Capital. What a privilege it is to be among so many women, allies, and supporters.

As the expert agency overseeing communications in the United States, the Federal Communications Commission is tasked with making sure that the networks we rely upon to connect are there when we need them most. We work to serve the public interest.

Yet in the FCC's nearly nine-decade history, not many women have had a seat at the table. I am the first woman ever confirmed to serve as Chair. And if you are the first in any environment, it goes without saying you know a thing or two about strength and resilience.

I think we stay strong by staying connected. That is why communities like this are so important. You provide vital support for those who find themselves in situations that are too much for one person to bear alone.

To stay connected, we rely on our friends and family. We also rely on our phones.

For those affected by domestic violence and abuse, a phone is a life saver. It makes it possible to get help when in dangerous situations. It is a gateway to building a new life, away from harm.

That is why last year I had the agency start an inquiry to seek comment on how FCC programs could help survivors of domestic violence and harmful abuse get access to the connections they need to safely rebuild their lives.

Good ideas often achieve their own momentum. Because something really neat happened after we started this inquiry. Congress passed a law—the Safe Connections Act—that provided the FCC with new authority to assist survivors of domestic violence with secure access to communications. Congress also gave us something else: a deadline to get this done.

So, back in February, I shared proposals with my colleagues to implement the Safe Connections Act. At the time, I committed to getting this done and made it a priority for the FCC. And today I am pleased to share with you that at the next FCC meeting—that would be November 15—my colleagues and I will be voting to adopt rules that make that commitment a reality.

So what do they involve? Well, here is a preview of what to expect in our new rules.

First, we are going to address wireless family plans. This is how many of us get mobile service today. But while linking our lines on a single bill can be convenient, it presents real

challenges for someone trying to separate from an abuser. So we are going to require providers to separate lines linked to family plans where the abuser is on the account. Under the law, providers will have to allow these special requests to be submitted by remote, secure means and process them fast—within two business days.

Next, we are going to make sure a caller's privacy is protected. We are requiring providers to block records of calls or text messages to domestic abuse hotlines and other support services to make it safer for survivors to reach out for help. We do not want these calls listed on household bills. We know that creates unique vulnerabilities and can make it harder for a survivor to make a call and get the assistance they need.

Lastly, we are going to make sure that survivors have the support they need to rebuild their lives by making sure every one of them has communications service. Under the law, we will deem our Lifeline program as a designated emergency support program for survivors. What that means is that for six months after separating from an abuser—by removing themselves from their family plan—a survivor struggling to make ends meet gets a discount on their phone bill. This can help them stay in contact with the support systems they need to develop financial independence and rebuild their life.

These efforts will help survivors stay connected. But we did not get this far on our own. So let me thank Senator Schatz, Senator Fischer, Representative Eshoo, Representative Walberg, and Representative Kuster for championing the Safe Connections Act. Let me also thank the many advocates and allies that work on domestic violence for engaging with us, teaching us, and offering us thoughtful input at the FCC to help get us to this moment.

But this is not the only aspect of our work that matters for survivors of domestic violence and abuse.

Let's talk some more about our phones. Our wireless phones know our location at any given moment. For survivors of domestic violence, that geolocation data is especially sensitive. It is a record of where we have been, and by extension who we are. This information needs to be treated with care. When it gets into the wrong hands it can be dangerous.

That is why when the FCC saw reporting about carriers selling off this data, we started an investigation. We learned that the country's largest wireless carriers were selling real-time location information—where we are with our phones and when—to data aggregators. Then these data aggregators would go on to sell it to others. So back in 2020, the FCC fined our largest wireless carriers for selling and sharing geolocation data. Three years later, the companies still owe more than \$200 million. It is time to hold these carriers accountable and make them pay for this ugly practice. So I am calling on my colleagues to bring this chapter to a close by finalizing these fines and voting for the Forfeiture Orders I have shared with them. We need to make clear that carriers selling geolocation data is a violation of privacy. The threat it poses to those in dangerous situations is real, and we cannot let it stand.

I think this action is a reminder that there is a deep connection between privacy and communications. That is why I created the first-ever Privacy and Data Protection Task Force at

the FCC. It brings our legal and technical experts together to look at issues like the ones I just discussed, so that we can maximize coordination and use the law to get results.

Now there is one more privacy issue at stake I want to discuss. Over the past month or so, you may have heard a renewed debate around net neutrality. To be clear, I support net neutrality. This is the idea that your broadband company should not block websites, throttle services, or censor content online. Net neutrality makes it possible for all of us to go where we want and do what we want online. Women especially are using the power of the internet to share stories and build businesses. This is how we organize. This is how we create community. This is how we make our voices heard.

But in 2017, the FCC walked away from net neutrality. When it did this it also walked away from its privacy authority over broadband providers. So we are clear, this is the same authority that made it possible for us to go after carriers selling phone location data to the highest bidder. That means right now those privacy protections extend to phone service customers but not broadband subscribers. Does that really make sense? We know that survivors of domestic violence face unique privacy challenges, but it is clear to me no one should have their privacy put at risk by either their phone or internet provider.

There is a larger discussion about net neutrality happening right now. And there are so many other issues before the FCC. But with whatever we do, I hope we can consider how it could affect communications for those who are survivors of domestic violence. And going forward, I know we could use the support of this community to make sure secure rights and protections prevail.

It is an honor to be with you tonight. I am grateful for the work you do. I know it is important. I know it takes special strength. And I know it took too long to get the first FCC Chairwoman. So I am going to make up for lost time. That is why I want to get these things done—together.

Thank you.