

**TESTIMONY OF FCC COMMISSIONER
GEOFFREY STARKS
BEFORE THE UNITED STATES SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE,
SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION
ON NOMINATION TO SERVE ON THE
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
JUNE 22, 2023**

Good morning, Chair Cantwell, Ranking Member Cruz, and Members of this Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today as you consider my renomination for Commissioner of the Federal Communications Commission. I took office as a commissioner in January 2019, and I have had the privilege of working closely with this Committee during my tenure. While this setting feels slightly more familiar now than it did when I was last a nominee, I am no less humbled by this opportunity, and by the opportunity to speak with you, than I was five years ago. It is an honor to appear before you today.

As many of you know, I am and will forever consider myself to be a Kansan. My parents, Dr. Gregory and Janet Starks, still live there and traveled to be here with me today. Thank you, Mom and Dad, for your example and for raising me and my two brothers the way that you did. I always want to make you proud. Many thanks to my older brother, Dr. David Starks, and his wife, Dr. Kathy Starks, who are watching from their home in South Dakota; and my twin brother, Dr. Christopher Starks, and his family in Virginia.

My wife, Lauren, is here today as well, as is my seven-year-old daughter. My son, who is four, is at his last day of school this morning. Lauren, thank you for your love and support—I'm grateful for you every single day. Truly, I couldn't do it without you. And nothing makes me prouder than my two kids.

It is a tremendous honor to be renominated by the President. Last I discussed my nomination with you, I explained my commitment to advancing the core mission of the FCC as set forth in the Communications Act. Connecting all Americans to safe and secure networks. Protecting consumers. Promoting competition and innovation. As I stand before you today, the centrality of that mission to our daily lives is clearer than it has been at any point in the FCC's 89-year history. Because the way I see it, modern networks don't just connect us in the here and now. They also build a bridge to a better tomorrow—and to the best version of ourselves we can possibly be individually, collectively, and as a country. Employed. Healthy. Educated. Closer to the people we love and admire. Innovative. Secure. An engine of opportunity fueled up for another generation.

But that better tomorrow only comes if we faithfully advance the mission you gave us. And it starts by connecting everybody—rural, urban, and tribal—to high-quality, affordable broadband. Internet for all. Places like Gallia County, Ohio, show us the challenge and the promise. Several months after I was sworn in, I visited the Bossard Memorial Library in Gallipolis, the county seat and a river town of about 3,000. Many homes there lack access to a high-speed network but let me tell you, that library was a palace for the people. Early in the morning, folks

were lined up by the front door waiting for the chance to use one of the town's public computers. Others had retreated to the parking lot in the hopes of picking up a Wi-Fi signal from their car. In a town where nearly 1 in 5 live below the poverty line, several people I spoke with said a home broadband connection just wasn't in the cards.

It was experiences like this that made me focus so much of my attention as a commissioner on closing the digital divide. Over the last five years, and thanks to the leadership of Congress, we stand on the precipice of achieving that important goal. We have accomplished a great deal together. For example, with my colleagues, we have worked on a bipartisan basis to establish the Affordable Connectivity Program that is helping over 18.68 million vulnerable households get and stay connected. But there is more work to do. The National Broadband Map that you directed us to create continues to improve and will inform the Broadband Equity Access and Deployment programming at NTIA to deliver connectivity to Americans everywhere. It will take coordination across federal, state, local and Tribal governments to get across the finish line.

Wireless networks in particular have transformed American life. After mobile carriers spent a record \$108.5 billion at FCC spectrum auctions in the last three years alone, we saw 5G launch in more than 500 U.S. cities by the end of 2022—a whopping 70 percent increase over 2021 numbers and enough to surpass the previous world leader, China. All of this is a very promising start, but here, too, we have more work to do. For these technologies to truly reach their potential, our networks need to keep climbing in capability, coverage, and the choice they offer consumers.

With the unprecedented demand for communications services have come new and more challenging security vulnerabilities. Protecting Americans remains core to the FCC's mission. That's why I've also focused my commissionership on partnering with Congress to address these new threats. In my first year in office, I called for a focused effort to identify insecure equipment in U.S. telecommunications networks and rip-and-replace it with trusted sources – “Find It, Fix It, Fund It.” With support from Congress, we developed and now continue to implement that critical program. We've also worked to reconfigure and restore trust in our networks so that unlawful robocalls decline in volume and eventually become an historic relic.

If confirmed, I will continue to advance the important tasks you've given us, working with my colleagues and the talented staff at this agency. Chair Cantwell, Ranking Member Cruz, and Members of the Committee, thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to answering your questions.