

**STATEMENT OF
CHAIRWOMAN JESSICA ROSENWORCEL**

Re: *Accelerating Wireline Broadband Deployment by Removing Barriers to Infrastructure Investment*, WC Docket No. 17-84, Fourth Report and Order, Declaratory Ruling, and Third Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (December 13, 2023)

In the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, Congress made a historic \$65 billion commitment to ensure that everyone, everywhere in the United States has access to broadband. Reaching 100 percent of us with high-speed service takes work and the details matter. Networks need to be designed. Rights of way need to be negotiated. And fiber optic cable needs to be attached to utility poles, which are often owned by local electric companies or telephone companies.

Under Section 224 of the Communications Act, the Federal Communications Commission has authority to oversee the rates, terms, and conditions of these pole attachments. Though under the law states may elect to take on this task themselves, more than half of the states have chosen to rely on the system the Commission has established under Section 224. Today, we update that system in order to ensure that the investment Congress made in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law is fully modern and meets this moment.

First, we are creating a new process to resolve pole attachment disputes fast and effectively. If a company trying to build new broadband service gets into a disagreement with a pole owner, it can bog down deployment. So we are establishing a new intra-agency rapid response team—the Rapid Broadband Assessment Team—to speed dispute resolution.

Second, we are increasing transparency by expanding access to pole inspection reports. This means pole owners will have to share reports with new attachers deploying broadband so they have information about where poles have been identified for replacement. Those building broadband benefit from having these facts upfront and early.

Third, we update our policies to make clear when an attacher does not have to pay the full cost to replace an existing pole. Again, clarifying this can help with new deployment.

Finally, we ask for input on additional reforms to help speed processing applications for big projects, like the kind we expect to see with the funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

Pole attachments do not always receive the attention they deserve. They are not the most glamorous part of broadband deployment. But they are an essential part of our effort to ensure that high-speed service reaches everyone, everywhere across the country. Our action today puts them in the spotlight and readies them for the real work that follows the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to help close the digital divide.

I want to thank the staff who have worked on this effort, including Michele Berlove, Adam Copeland, Ty Covey, Trent Harkrader, Jodie May, Kiara Ortiz, and Michael Ray from the Wireline Competition Bureau; Lisa Boehley, Loyaan Egal, Pamela Gallant, Lisa Griffin, Rosemary McEnery, Lisa Saks, and Adam Suppes from the Enforcement Bureau; Richard Mallen, Anjali Singh, Derek Yeo, and Chin Yoo from the Office of General Counsel; Eric Ralph from the Office of Economics and Analytics; and Joycelyn James from the Office of Communications Business Opportunities.