

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER GEOFFREY STARKS**

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 Rulemaking

Pole attachments are essential. For broadband to be deployed nationwide to all Americans, Internet Service Providers (ISPs) need access to this vital infrastructure, especially utility poles, that enables fast and cost-efficient access to consumers. We have seen significant investment and deployment nationwide by ISPs, to the tune of billions of dollars. And of course, Congress created the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program and appropriated over \$42 billion to expand high-speed Internet access nationwide. With the influx of so much broadband funding, it is imperative that we ensure that attachers can quickly get the attachments they need so that consumers have access to the broadband they want. So, on top of our efforts in the past to streamline the pole attachment process by adopting shot clocks and one touch-make ready, today we take additional steps that balance the needs of both pole attachers and pole owners, with consumers in mind.

Specifically, I strongly support the creation of the Rapid Broadband Assessment Team that should cut down disputes that threaten to impede broadband deployment. I also support clarification on the definition of a “red tagged” pole to minimize disputes going forward. Further, I’m glad that we take the opportunity in the Declaratory Ruling to clarify that for large attachment applications featuring more than 3,000 poles or 5% of a utility’s poles in a state, the first 3,000 designated poles are subject to our 45-day make-ready timeline. These are smart steps that will make a big difference.

But there are two topics that I want to highlight that are crucial if BEAD and the other broadband funding programs are to succeed. First, I support the Order’s amendments to our one touch-make ready rules, requiring utilities to provide attachers with information they have prepared about the poles covered in an attachment application.

I want to emphasize that this does not mean that additional information that has traditionally been shared to facilitate pole attachment agreements should no longer be shared. This is a floor, not a ceiling, and all parties should engage in further information sharing to facilitate the expeditious deployment of broadband. I’ll be watching closely.

Second, we seek further comment on two very important issues that will come into play as BEAD funding is deployed – large attachment applications and the self-help rules. I hope the Commission can move quickly on both of the topics in the Further Notice to eliminate as many outstanding questions as possible before BEAD funding flows. I look forward to engaging further to make sure our rules are appropriately balanced for all interested parties.

I thank the Chairwoman for her leadership and FCC staff for their continued efforts on pole attachments. I approve.