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NATIONAL PLAN TO END GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE
ONE-YEAR ANNIVERSARY
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Good morning. Thank you to Jen Klein and everyone at the White House Gender Policy Council for inviting me to be here. More importantly, thank you for developing the first-ever National Plan to End Gender-Based Violence, and congratulations on one year of progress.

At first blush, it may not be clear what the Federal Communications Commission is doing at an event about gender violence. But if you stop to think about how digital technologies are woven into every facet of our lives, it quickly becomes obvious that we are a key part of solving this challenge.

Let me explain. Before announcing the National Plan, back in 2022, the President signed the Safe Connections Act. This law gave the Commission new tools to address communications for survivors of domestic violence. We have embraced this responsibility—and rightfully so—when one in four women in this country are survivors of domestic violence.

For anyone affected by domestic abuse, a phone is a lifesaver. It makes it possible to reach out for help, and it is a gateway to building a new life away from harm. So the Commission took the new tools in the Safe Connections Act and put them to use.

We started with family plans. Most of us sign up for family phone plans because it is convenient and less costly. But for survivors, this can be a source of control. These plans allow an abusive partner to monitor calls and location. So we adopted rules that require carriers to swiftly and securely separate phone lines of survivors from family plans.

Along those lines, we also adopted rules to make sure that survivors can safely call domestic violence hotlines by removing these numbers from call and text logs. This means they can reach out without fear of discovery from their abusers. And because survivors often struggle financially when they start building new lives away from harm, we set up a way for them to get discounted phone service.

This is real progress. But there is a new challenge that survivors are facing when it comes to connectivity. Because it is not just our phones that can track where we go and what we do. The newest generation of cars are like smartphones on wheels. They come with built-in connections that can help locate your car in a vast parking lot or call for emergency assistance when you get in a crash. But, in the wrong hands, these connections and this data can be used to do real harm.

Late last year, the *New York Times* ran a story laying out the ways connected cars are being weaponized by abusers to stalk and harass survivors. A big problem is that, much like family plans for phones, the survivor's use of the car tethers them to their abuser. The survivor calls the car company looking for relief, only to be told there is nothing that can be done.

I don't think that answer is good enough. Because like a smartphone, access to a car is a lifeline for survivors. It is a means of independence, and it is often essential for those seeking employment and support. That is why, last month, the Commission started a rulemaking to explore ways to empower survivors to separate the connections in their cars, just like they can separate their phone lines from family plans. To do this we are taking our cues from communications law and the Safe Connections Act.

The bottom line is that no survivor of domestic violence and abuse should have to choose between giving up their vehicle and allowing themselves to be stalked and harmed by those who can access its connections and sensitive data about where they go and what they do. Instead, we can make sure these new forms of communications can help keep survivors safe. And working with partners like the people in the room, we will.

Thank you, again, to the White House Gender Policy Council for your leadership and partnership. I look forward to your continued collaboration and appreciate you having me here today.