

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER DEBORAH TAYLOR TATE**

Re: In the Matter of Rural Health Care Support Mechanism, WC Docket No. 02-60

I am pleased to support today's item because it acknowledges and encourages the incredible benefits broadband can bring to our nation's public and non-profit healthcare facilities. Section 254 of the Act recognizes the importance of rural health care facilities to the deployment of broadband throughout our nation. The item we adopt today helps to advance that goal. The pilot program initiated by today's item is an inventive approach to encourage innovative health practices, especially in the rural and remote areas of the country where health care has often been more difficult and expensive to provide.

The FCC has a far broader role in health care than most Americans think. From approving waivers for specialized implant devices to promoting the advancement of broadband networks that support telehealth services spreading the reach of the latest health technology and services. It has been exciting for me to see first-hand how new technologies combined with broadband enable everything from remote surgery to telepsychiatry, and teledentistry. I have witnessed first-hand how the technology at both a research hospital and one of the most remote communities in the U.S. links up and works together not only to improve people's health and lives, but also to narrow the miles between doctor and patient.

Likewise, with regard to mental health, I have been able to see how broadband and new technologies are improving access to behavioral health treatment for clients in the most rural and isolated parts of our nation. Even in the wilds of Alaska – hundreds of miles from anywhere and reachable only by snowmobile, airplane or dogsled – telepsychiatry helps psychiatrists maintain regular contact through video observation and live interaction with their patients. Centerstone, the largest behavioral health provider in Tennessee, is leading efforts toward improved outcomes through electronic medical records and sharing research-based “best practices” with mental health centers across the country.

These benefits pertain, of course, to people in rural and remote parts of our country who will benefit from the access to specialists and research that, until recently, was often only available in urban centers. We must also keep in mind that these technologies will also keep our nation on the leading edge of our rapidly changing world. We must ensure that our nation remains competitive in a global environment including not only technology and industry, but also in terms of consumer welfare, education, and health care. Today's item promises to explore a way to further support the broadband networks for health care that can truly make a difference in people's lives. I look forward to hearing and seeing exciting ideas and projects envisioned by rural healthcare providers, which in turn, will hopefully improve the care patients may receive no matter where they may choose to live.