

**STATEMENT OF
ACTING CHAIRWOMAN MIGNON L. CLYBURN**

Re: *Rural Call Completion*, WC Docket No. 13-39.

At the core of the FCC's mission is an obligation to ensure all Americans have access to reliable communications services. Yet, in rural America, an alarming number of calls are not being completed. This is unacceptable and today I am proud to say that the FCC is taking meaningful action to end this disparity.

How big of a problem is this? Part of the challenge that today's Order seeks to remedy is that we don't exactly know the answer. But according to one study, nearly a third of rural lines that were tested had completion problems on more than 20% of incoming calls. The same study found that the call-failure rate was more than 13-times higher in rural areas than in non-rural areas. Clearly, a problem exists. And it has real consequences.

We've heard about calls from doctors to nursing homes not going through, that calls to businesses aren't getting completed, and that rural consumers are frustrated when their friends and family are not able to reach them. Even more critically, calls to public safety authorities that are not completed can literally mean the difference between life and death. Consumers expect and deserve to be able to make and receive phone calls.

When any American, rural or urban, is cut off from communications, the FCC must take decisive and meaningful action. I've long been a champion for fast and effective remedies to address rural call completion problems and resolving the issue has been a personal priority. Today's Order represents a welcome step forward in making sure that this serious issue is properly addressed. I am pleased by our efforts to tackle this problem through the formation of a Rural Call Completion Task Force, with the issuance of clarifying orders, and the pursuit of enforcement cases. And today, we take our biggest step yet toward fixing the problem.

This Order will enhance our ability to investigate and crack down on call completion problems by requiring providers to retain information about calls on their networks and report it to the FCC. The data can isolate call completion problems, drive improvements by providers, and arm the FCC with powerful tools for enforcement. The Order will also give our state partners invaluable data on intrastate calls to assist them in their efforts to address call completion issues. Moreover, the Order gives providers incentives to immediately improve rural service quality by offering a safe harbor that eases data collection and reporting requirements for providers that adopt practices that are known to improve call completion rates. And, the Order includes a waiver process for providers that meet the safe harbor that will further reduce the burden for providers that demonstrate superior call completion practices.

I'm also pleased that the Order takes immediate and common-sense steps to help identify the scope of the problem, reduce consumer confusion, and improve the quality of long distance calls for rural Americans. One significant improvement focuses on ring tones. When a caller hears a ring tone in the handset after dialing, he or she assumes the call has gone through. But that's not always the case. The caller may hear ringing, when in fact, the call never rings on the other end of the line. This practice masks the problem of failed calls and mistakenly leads consumers into believing that the call was completed but no one picked up. This Order prohibits this premature "ringing." Silence on the line will make it clear to consumers when there is a call completion issue, and this will help providers more quickly identify problems.

While today's Order will be a significant step forward, we must remain vigilant, which is why we seek comment on further action in the Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking. The Further Notice will make sure that we continue to have the tools necessary to take additional steps to investigate and eliminate call completion concerns.

I'd like to thank Commissioners Rosenworcel and Pai for their consideration of this item, Wireline Competition Bureau Chief Julie Veach and the rest of the Wireline and Enforcement Bureaus as well as Rebekah Goodheart for their work on this item and their dedication and tireless efforts to address this critical problem in rural America.