

**STATEMENT OF  
COMMISSIONER JESSICA ROSENWORCEL**

Re: *Lifeline and Link Up Reform and Modernization*, WC Docket No. 11-42, *Telecommunications Carriers Eligible for Universal Service Support*, WC Docket No. 09-197, *Connect America Fund*, WC Docket No. 10-90.

Thirty years ago, the Lifeline program got its start when President Ronald Reagan was in the White House and most communications involved a cord. For three decades, this program has helped the neediest among us connect—connect to family, jobs, healthcare, and help when emergency strikes. These connections make us stronger. That is why over time, the Commission updated the Lifeline program to include both wireline and wireless telephony. Today, we continue on this course—with a rulemaking to update the Lifeline program to include broadband.

I support this rulemaking because I believe a well-run, up-to-date Lifeline program is worth the effort. If we do it right, we will modernize the Lifeline program to incorporate broadband. If we do it right, we will increase accountability and internal controls. And if we do it right, we will expand opportunity for too many among us who for too long have been consigned to the wrong side of the digital divide.

There are so many reasons this rulemaking is important. But I want to bring laser-like focus on one of them: the Homework Gap.

When I was growing up, homework required nothing more than your siblings leaving you alone, a clear workspace, and a Number 2 pencil.

Those days are gone. Not just because the school year is winding down. They are gone because today as many as seven in ten teachers assign homework that requires access to broadband. But data from this Commission suggests one in three households do not subscribe to broadband service.

So let's do the math and think about those numbers. Where they overlap is what I call the Homework Gap. According to the Pew Research Center, the Homework Gap is real because five million households out of the 29 million households in this country with school-aged children lack access to broadband.

Now think about what it means to be a student in a household without broadband. Just getting basic schoolwork done is hard. Applying for a scholarship is challenging. Researching or typing a paper is tough. Borrowing a device and finding a signal that is not password protected becomes a prerequisite for getting any schoolwork done. This is a quest too many students struggle with every day.

The evidence is all around us. Earlier this year the Hispanic Heritage Foundation, Family Online Safety Institute, and My College Options found that nearly 50 percent of students say they have been unable to complete a homework assignment because they did not have access to the Internet or a computer. On top of that, 42 percent of students say they received a lower grade on an assignment because they didn't have access to the Internet or a computer.

We can do better than this. We must. Because students who lack regular broadband access are struggling to keep up—and their lack of access is holding our education system back. In fact, according to the Pew Research Center more than half of teachers in low-income communities have said that their students' lack of access to online resources at home presents a major challenge to integrating technology into their teaching.

That's a problem because one-half of all jobs now require some level of digital skills. By the end of the decade, that number will be 77 percent. School-aged kids without broadband access at home are not only unable to complete their homework, they enter the job market with a serious handicap. And that

loss is more than individual. It's a loss to our collective human capital and shared economic future that we need to address.

If soapbox statistics don't make this clear, stories will.

Take Citronelle, Alabama. After school, students head to McDonalds. They head to a fast food restaurant because it is one of the few places in town with Wi-Fi. So students who do not have broadband at home hunker down in booths to do their homework. They research and write their papers with fizzy drinks and a side of fries.

In Pinconning, Michigan, near Saginaw Bay, there is a fast food franchisee who says he can tell when exams are coming up in the local school district. That's because students without online access at home file into his restaurant with laptops in tow. Those who cannot afford food or drink simply sit with their devices in the parking lot. Often their parents drive them there, doing what they can on limited incomes to catch a signal to help their children complete basic school assignments.

In Cutler Bay, Florida, just south of Miami, parents of young kids who lack broadband at home shuffle into the library. Then they queue up for computers to get their children time online to do their schoolwork. The lines are long, the wait times tough. But the need is real—because there are Miami-Dade county high schools that use digital history textbooks and elementary schools that use a math program that requires online access.

Now these students in Alabama, Michigan, and Florida are actually the lucky ones. They do not have broadband at home—but with grit, ingenuity, and the help of their parents they have found ways to cobble together the connectivity they need to get their schoolwork done. But it's hard.

So what can we do? Back to Lifeline. Today, we start a process to modernize Lifeline and incorporate broadband into the program. We ask questions about putting in place minimum standards to make sure the program is cost-effective and fair. In addition, we seek to streamline the eligibility process and reduce the potential for fraud by taking enrollment out of the hands of carriers. We also seek input on a number of other commonsense changes to improve program administration and reduce waste, including improvements to the National Lifeline Accountability Database.

Of course, Lifeline is only part of the equation. Solving the Homework Gap requires more than modernizing the program we discuss here. But it's a start. Combine this effort with more Wi-Fi in more places—and innovative initiatives like the wireless hotspots available for loan at the New York Public Library and the routers added to school buses to assist with ride-time connectivity for homework by Coachella, a rural farming community in California—and we will develop new ways to help students get their homework done. We need more creative efforts like these—now.

Now is not a moment too soon. Because this is about the future. The future of our economy, our country, and our success is built on a digital and diverse workforce. We all know that science, technology, engineering, and math are the fastest growing fields in the economy. We also know that the diversity of our STEM workforce does not mirror the diversity of our population. It's time to fix this and make our kids—all our kids—not just digital consumers, but digital creators. And there are a lot of things we can do to make this happen. But we can start by making it possible for all students to do their homework. And we can begin with modernizing the Lifeline program right here, right now, today. Because the Homework Gap is the cruelest part of the digital divide, but it is within our power to bridge it.

So let me thank the Chairman for putting this rulemaking before the Commission today and thank Commissioner Clyburn for her dedication to raising the profile of this program. This rulemaking has my full support.