**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER JESSICA ROSENWORCEL,
CONCURRING**

Re: *Complaints Involving the Political Files of WCNC-TV, Inc., licensee of Station WCNC-TV, Charlotte, NC, et al.*, Memorandum Opinion and Order.

For decades, the Federal Communications Commission has required that broadcast stations keep a public file with information about the station's operation and service to the community. These filings include things like station authorizations, contour maps, and ownership reports. They also include what is known as a political file. It features sponsorship information concerning political advertisements paid for by candidates, groups, and individuals; details on when they run; and what issues they discuss.

More than a decade and a half ago, in the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act, Congress charged the FCC with overseeing changes to what specifically needs to be included in the political file. Among other things, Congress specified that licensees must maintain and make available for public inspection a complete record of requests to purchase broadcast time that features "a message relating to any political matter of national importance," including legally qualified candidates, election to federal office, or "a national legislative issue of public importance."

In this decision, the FCC updates its policies regarding these provisions. This clarifying effort comes after an earlier Bureau-level decision regarding the same complaints which featured a different interpretation of the statutory language that did not put a premium on whether the legislation at issue in an advertisement is currently pending in Congress. While I would have preferred that we not cause confusion by revisiting our interpretation, I believe the reading here is a reasonable attempt to modernize our policies. For this reason, I will concur.

However, this modernization step alone is woefully inadequate.

A little less than a decade ago, the FCC decided it was time to begin uploading the contents of these public inspection files online. As part of this effort, the agency required that going forward new political file materials would also be uploaded in the same manner. Thanks to this decision, the agency effectively moved documents from dusty file cabinets dispersed across the country to a centralized online public portal. As a result, right now there are thousands and thousands of entities that post their public file online at the FCC. In fact, there were 42,111 documents and records posted to the agency's political file portal in the last week alone.

So far, so good. But now the hard truth: this system is dated. These filings are not machine-readable. They cannot be processed by a computer. That means they are stuck in analog age format. They are not built for the era we live in now—where data is all. Consequently, journalists, researchers, advocates, and the public at large do not have the ability to download, sort, or search our files in a meaningful way. That means it is all but impossible to use this system to study trends in everything from media ownership to political advertising. In fact, researchers have called our data "pretty useless," and "effectively unusable."

This matters. At a time when billions are spent on television advertising each election cycle, our online political file could be an invaluable tool for the public to know who is sponsoring candidates and trying to influence our elections. But right now, our data is so difficult to navigate, this is not possible.

I think we can do better. The Internal Revenue Service provides machine-readable data for non-profit organizations that allows for bulk downloads. The Federal Election Commission has standardized forms with machine-readable data and archives that make it possible to track trends over time. In other words, agencies across Washington have already updated their online platforms. They offer machine-

readable data—and in the process support transparency in elections. We should do the same. We should update the public file system for the digital age. It should be searchable, sortable, and downloadable. It should be transparent and useful for the public.

There are big questions about who pays for political advertising and where those election advertisements now find ears and eyeballs. Likewise, there are big questions about how, as citizens, we get the information we need to make decisions about our lives, our communities, and our country. Between broadcasting, cable, and online platforms, candidates, organizations, and individuals have many ways to reach the voting public. This agency, however, has long had an admirable role in promoting transparency in political advertising through its public file system. That transparency has served us well, but it will no longer do so if our filing system is stuck in the analog age. For an agency charged with developing the digital future, this is an embarrassment. It's one we can fix. I sincerely hope we do so without further delay.