

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER GEOFFREY STARKS**

Re: *Partitioning, Disaggregation, and Leasing of Spectrum*, WT Docket No. 19-38

Two weeks ago, on my first visit outside the beltway as an FCC Commissioner, I traveled to Kansas City, Missouri, along with Congressman Emanuel Cleaver, who represents Missouri's Fifth District. We were eager to learn more about the work being done on the ground to help close the digital divide in Kansas City and how we, in Washington, could help facilitate, support and amplify those efforts.

Among many stops, I attended a meeting of the Kansas City Coalition for Digital Inclusion, a group formed for the singular purpose of addressing the digital divide in Kansas City. Comprised of representatives from area nonprofits, government entities, and businesses, as well as individuals, the group is "focused on fostering internet access and digital readiness in greater Kansas City." Missouri ranks 41st in the U.S. in connectivity and internet access, so it is abundantly clear that when it comes to ensuring every American can benefit from the transformative power of robust and affordable broadband, we have our work cut out for us, in Missouri and across the nation.

To that end, I welcome any and all ideas that show promise in helping us bridge the digital divide. I am pleased to support today's item, which fulfills Congress' directive in the MOBILE NOW Act and explores how potential changes to the Commission's partitioning, disaggregation, and leasing rules would increase small carriers' access to spectrum, expand the availability of broadband in rural areas, and advance our collective goal of closing the digital divide. I look forward to reviewing the record that develops in this proceeding and challenge stakeholders to put forward their best and most innovative ideas.

My thanks to the Wireless Telecommunications Bureau for your important work on this item.