

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER GEOFFREY STARKS**

Re: *Rural Health Care Support Mechanism*, WC Docket No. 02-60.

The Rural Health Care program is essential to realizing the potential for telehealth. It supports the links that enable telehealth – which has great promise to transform the way that people in rural areas, and all over the country, access care and interact with doctors and medical professionals. I support the actions this order takes that will allow health care provider consortiums to receive support for Funding Year 2018.

Last year the Commission expanded funding to the Rural Health Care program because the fund had recently become oversubscribed for the first time. Here, we similarly see that funding year 2018 was the first time that applications for consortium funding exceeded the applicable \$150 million cap. We need to evaluate and better understand the growth in demand for the Healthcare Connect Fund, so we can stay ahead of changes and enable the program to meet the needs of those it serves.

I'm mindful that preparing orders requires a great deal of work, and I'd like to thank the dedicated staff of WCB for preparing this one.