

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER GEOFFREY STARKS**

Re: *Modernizing the E-Rate Program for Schools and Libraries*, WC Docket No. 13-184, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking

The E-Rate Universal Service program is a critical source of support for schools and libraries. It's on the front lines of the fight against internet inequality – enabling schools and libraries to provide high-speed broadband connections to students and communities. These connections bring a world of educational opportunities into classrooms so that students in rural, urban, Tribal and other areas of the U.S. have the same access and opportunity to succeed as students anywhere else.

Five years ago, the Commission began an experiment that simplified the process for schools and libraries to receive E-Rate support for “internal connections,” which, in many cases, means Wi-Fi networks. Wi-Fi is crucial to bringing a school's or library's broadband connection right to a student or library user's individual tablet, smartphone, laptop computer, or connected device.

As a result, many more schools and libraries have received support over the past five years for Wi-Fi network projects than was possible under the prior system. In fact, under the prior system, our funding methodology prioritized other types of connections – meaning that in some years we were able to fund few or no applications that sought to deploy Wi-Fi networks. What's more, the lack of certainty of funding under the prior methodology discouraged schools and libraries from applying for funding for Wi-Fi networks.

Today's NPRM takes steps toward solidifying the improvements in the E-Rate program based on what we learned during the experiment. I support these steps – the data gathered over the past five years is compelling – and I note that during this time no applications for Wi-Fi network support were denied due to insufficient funding. Many more schools and libraries have requested and received Wi-Fi funding, and the overall funding for internal connections has dramatically increased. These are all good signs that the experiment worked. I look forward to reviewing the record that we receive in response to this NPRM and taking additional steps toward making these improvements to the E-Rate program permanent.

Many thanks to the staff of the Wireline Competition Bureau for their work and for preparing this NPRM. It has my support.