

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER GEOFFREY STARKS**

Re: *Promoting Telehealth for Low Income Americans*, WC Docket No. 18-213; *COVID-19 Telehealth Program*, WC Docket No. 20-89.

As more and more Americans are being asked to stay home, the already urgent need for expanded telehealth resources has become even more critical. Unless in-person care is required for a medical reason, experts agree that getting care from a distance helps protect the entire community. Coming from a family of doctors, I have already heard numerous stories from my father and brothers of how caregivers on the front lines are using telehealth to address the challenges of COVID-19. I appreciate that Congress recognized this need in the CARES Act, and that the Commission has acted quickly to start the process of getting that money into the field. Thank you to the many members of the Commission's staff who worked quickly under challenging conditions to make this possible.

Looking ahead, I believe that long-term investments in telehealth will improve healthcare when this crisis has passed and help us prepare for future public health emergencies. We know that many places across the country face shortages of doctors and other public health providers. In my travels around the country, people in both small towns and big cities have told me about the challenges of in-person visits because of medical resources that are too far away, health conditions that make travel difficult, or simply a lack of qualified providers. As I have noted previously, this situation is particularly acute when it comes to access to mental health services. According to the Health Resources & Services Administration, 112 million Americans live in areas with shortages of such caregivers. I am pleased, therefore, to see that the pilot program we adopt today includes mental health services.

I am also glad that the pilot program focuses on meeting the needs of low-income people and veterans. As the coronavirus pandemic continues, more and more Americans face unprecedented economic challenges. Just last week, a record 3.3 million American applied for unemployment benefits. More hardships are ahead. I am hopeful that this pilot program will both provide targeted assistance to communities in need as soon as possible and pave the way for a broader commitment to improving health care and connectivity for low-income people.