

**STATEMENT OF
CHAIRMAN AJIT PAI**

Re: *Establishing the Digital Opportunity Data Collection*, WC Docket No. 19-195;
Modernizing the FCC Form 477 Data Program, WC Docket No. 11-10.

In 2017, my first year as Chairman of the FCC, I instituted a proceeding to reform the much-maligned FCC Form 477, the Commission's current broadband deployment reporting mechanism. The well-known problem with Form 477 is that it is effectively "low resolution"—only depicting whether a given census block has service available, even if only some parts of the census block are served. Every consumer can appreciate the problem this raises; it's all well and good that your neighbor down the road has broadband, but that doesn't mean or do anything for your ability to go online.

It's fitting that one of my last acts as Chairman is to secure a unanimous vote to adopt rules in this Report and Order implementing the Digital Opportunity Data Collection. This is the new mechanism the Commission is developing to collect granular, precise broadband service availability data. I'm pleased that Congress has finally come through to fund development of these maps. I've been calling for this funding ever since Congress enacted the Broadband DATA Act, which cut off the Commission's planned funding source for the new maps and neglected to give us a direct appropriation to fill the gap.

With today's Report and Order, the rules are in place to begin the process of developing the IT infrastructure to begin collecting these new coverage maps that will finally show us, with unprecedented precision, where broadband is available and where it isn't. And it will allow state, local, and Tribal government entities, along with individual consumers and other entities, to directly participate in creating the broadband availability maps through crowdsourcing and a direct challenge process. There's a lot of work ahead, but I know our staff is up to the challenge and will deliver.

As the Digital Opportunity Data Collection broadband coverage maps come online, the Form 477 will take on a diminished role. But one can't overlook the hard work it has allowed us to accomplish over the last four years. In particular, it has played a part in a number of the Commission's universal service efforts over the last four years. It's helped us reform the legacy high-cost program. It's helped us promote storm-hardened, resilient networks in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands following historic hurricanes. It's aided our CAF Phase II and Rural Digital Opportunity Fund Phase I auctions. All told, these efforts account for enforceable commitments to deploy at least 25/3 Mbps broadband to a combined 8.2 million unserved homes and businesses.

And as far as last hurrahs go, the Form 477's was a good one. Using the census block-level broadband availability data it provides, we were able to identify the least-served parts of the country—nearly 800,000 census blocks that no one was willing to serve without federal support. As a result of vigorous bidding in the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund Phase I auction, more than 10 million Americans living in these wholly unserved areas will finally get a broadband connection. What's more, the vast majority—nearly 85% of the homes and businesses located there—will get gigabit service. The new maps that will be implemented in this proceeding will help the Commission locate those Americans living in partially served census blocks that still lack broadband. Ensuring that they gain access to broadband is the objective of the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund Phase II auction. But there can be no question that the FCC Form 477 had a real and meaningful impact on closing the digital divide.

The Digital Opportunity Data Collection will be an invaluable tool that will serve the Commission, Congress, and the public for years to come. This dataset will be critical to understanding and addressing the problems our nation faces in broadband deployment. We've come a long way since 2017, and I'm excited to see where the path goes from here.

For their hard work on this important proceeding, I want to thank Emily Burke, Jonathan Campbell, Patrick DeGraba, Judith Dempsey, Chelsea Fallon, Alex Espinoza, Ben Freeman, Kenneth Lynch, Rachel Kazan, Michael Janson, Catherine Mataves, Jonathan McCormack, Giulia McHenry, Suzanne Mendez, Steven Rosenberg, Sean Sullivan, and Margaret Weiner of the Office of Economics and

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