

**STATEMENT OF
CHAIRWOMAN JESSICA ROSENWORCEL**

Re: *Accelerating Wireline Broadband Deployment by Removing Barriers to Infrastructure Investment*, WC Docket No. 17-84, Second Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (March 16, 2022).

There was a time, not that long ago, when you could call broadband nice-to-have, not need-to-have. Those days are over. This pandemic has made it crystal clear that we need to connect everyone, everywhere in this country—no matter who they are or where they live.

Thanks to Congress we have the largest effort ever in the United States to do just that. We are investing \$65 billion in broadband deployment, affordability, and availability through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. It's a big deal—on par with the investment made to connect the country with the interstate highway system back in 1956.

We are going to make history. But to do it, the details matter. This rulemaking is about those details, namely, the work involved in deploying fiber optic cable. It's a complicated business. Networks need to be designed. Rights of way need to be negotiated. And fiber optic cable needs to be attached to utility poles—which are often owned and controlled by the local electric company or telephone company.

Some of the companies that are in the process of building broadband to unserved and underserved areas have told us that the cost of these pole attachments can make up as much as one-third of the cost of rural deployment. That's a lot. But that figure doesn't even include the time required to negotiate and strike agreements for access to every pole.

The bottom line is that we can't afford to have access to utility poles become an impediment to broadband deployment. We are about to invest billions in high-speed infrastructure nationwide. It's essential that we have policies in place that make sure these dollars are used in a cost-effective way and that pole attachment policies facilitate, rather than impede, broadband buildout.

Congress has long recognized that fair access to utility poles is important for the construction and maintenance of communications networks. That's why Section 224 of the Communications Act provides the Federal Communications Commission with authority to oversee the rates, terms, and conditions of pole attachments. We need to use this authority to ensure that communications providers have nondiscriminatory access to this essential infrastructure—and it's especially important to do this right now as historic federal investments begin.

That's why today we seek comment on changes to our rules governing pole attachments. In particular, we ask about whether we need to provide greater clarity when a pole must be replaced before additional attachments are possible. We ask about how the cost of pole replacements should be allocated between the pole owner and the attachers, and other economic and legal issues that may arise with pole replacements. We also ask if there are other reforms we can make to speed up the process for negotiations over pole replacements and attachments, because certainty is good both for the providers seeking to build broadband networks and for the owners of utility poles.

Pole attachments and replacements don't always receive the attention they deserve. They're not the most glamorous part of broadband deployment. Soaring rhetoric about connecting all rarely features these fixtures on the ground. But they are an essential part of our effort to ensure high-speed service reaches everyone, everywhere across the country.

For their work on this rulemaking, I want to thank Pam Arluk, Adam Copeland, Liz Drogula, Trent Harkrader, Kris Monteith, Michael Nemicik, and Mike Ray of the Wireline Competition Bureau; Eugene Kiselev, Richard Kwiatkowski, Eric Ralph, and Emily Talaga of the Office of Economics and Analytics; Garnet Hanly, George Leris, and Belinda Nixon of the Wireless Telecommunications Bureau; Lisa Griffin, Rosemary McEnery, and Lisa Saks of the Enforcement Bureau; and Malena Barzilai, Rick Mallen, and Linda Oliver of the Office of General Counsel.