

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER GEOFFREY STARKS**

Re: *Lifeline and Link Up Reform and Modernization*, WC Docket No. 11-42; Affordable Connectivity Program, WC Docket No. 21-450; Supporting Survivors of Domestic and Sexual Violence, WC Docket No. 22-238, Notice of Inquiry (July 14, 2022).

One of my goals as a Commissioner is to ensure that all Americans have access to affordable and quality voice and broadband service. The need for connectivity is particularly critical for our nation's most vulnerable populations, including those who we focus on today: survivors of domestic and sexual violence. Individuals fleeing or recovering from violence may be eligible for certain Commission programs, but, due to their circumstances, find that at their greatest hour of need they are unable to clearly meet our enrollment rules. I feel strongly that in such cases it is right for us to consider how and in what ways we can modify certain Lifeline and Affordable Connectivity Program requirements to ensure access to these essential programs.

Survivors may be trying to escape their abuser and looking for help from a hotline, or living in or getting resources from a support shelter. I've seen first-hand the important work that support shelters do every day to help those in need. Two come to immediately to mind. Just this past May, I visited Hamilton Families' family-based transitional housing in San Francisco, which provides support to predominantly women and children experiencing homelessness, frequently the result of fleeing an unsafe and unstable home life. I have also seen tremendous work right here in DC visiting Miriam's Kitchen, where I sat down with a number of guests who shared their life story, and I also met and spoke with the dedicated staff helping individuals recover from serious trauma. One refrain from those meetings was consistent—empowering survivors to reach out when and how they see fit is a key part to supporting them as they look for a fresh start.

Of course, it takes courage for an individual experiencing domestic or sexual violence to reach out for help. Survivors that may be looking for help should feel confident that they can reach out to call or text a shelter or hotline for assistance without fear that their spouse or abuser may see a record of the call and act. So, I'm very interested in the record that develops following this Notice of Inquiry. Assistance programs such as ACP and Lifeline are critical tools to supporting these individuals.

I would like to thank the Commission staff for their hard work on this item. And, I want to thank Senators Schatz and Fischer and Representatives Eshoo and Kuster for their leadership in introducing the "Safe Connections Act," which if adopted would provide a clear direction to act on many of the questions the Commission asks today. I approve.