

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER GEOFFREY STARKS**

Re: *Affordable Connectivity Program*, WC Docket No. 21-450, Second Report and Order (August 5, 2022).

The Affordable Connectivity Program has achieved significant results this year—over 13 million eligible households have signed up to receive discounted or free broadband! This growth is worth celebrating, even more so because outreach and development has been organic, without a separately funded FCC outreach effort.

That changes today. I'm excited to vote for this item establishing the Affordable Connectivity Outreach Grant Program. It has my strong support for a number reasons. First, we will be funding outreach to diverse populations—persons with disabilities, individuals living in rural or Tribal communities, and those who have been historically underserved, marginalized, or adversely affected by poverty or inequality. I have called for outreach to these communities in past statements and speeches, and am glad to see this is reflected in this item.

These communities may not yet be aware of ACP, or may be skeptical. To reach them, we need exactly this type of targeted outreach. But, to be most effective, we need to support organizations and groups that are grounded in these communities. Specifically, we must ensure that media and other outreach organizations have real experience and expertise working with low-income people and communities of color. This is critical because we must close any trust gap that currently exists with many of the diverse populations that this Grant Program is designed to reach. Make no mistake—both the message and the messenger matter here.

Of course, many broadband providers have been promoting ACP to their customers and potential customers, and they should be commended. This is not an opportunity for them to take the foot off the gas. Not even close—we are full speed ahead. The Grant Program will compliment these efforts. We must all work together to get the word out.

Second, grants are an integral part of the *Your Home, Your Internet Pilot Program*. The Pilot Program will be giving out \$5 million in grant funding to Pilot Program participants focused on increasing awareness and enrollment among households receiving federal housing assistance. It is important that we have the grant process up and running as quickly as possible to support all of the important ongoing work for interested participants in the Pilot Program.

Third, I have heard from countless advocates, broadband providers, and community leaders over the past few years on how we can do better in reaching unconnected households, and meeting vulnerable communities where they are. This is your opportunity to become a full-fledged partner and help execute those ideas! Let's go—apply to participate and let's partner up to help close the digital divide.

Thank you to FCC staff for their impressive work on this item. It has my full support.