STATEMENT OF
CHAIRWOMAN JESSICA ROSENWORCEL

Re: *Space Innovation*, IB Docket No. 22-271; *Mitigation of Orbital Debris in the New Space Age*, IB Docket No. 18-313

Today we take the next step in our Space Innovation agenda. We take action to care for our skies to promote strength and sustainability in the space economy.

Right now there are thousands of metric tons of orbital debris in the air above—and it is going to grow. We need to address it. Because if we don't, this space junk could constrain new opportunities.

To explain why, look all the way back to the first space age. For billions of years, space was not a landscape for human endeavors. Then the space race began and in 1958 NASA sent Vanguard 1 into our skies—and it still circles the planet today.

At the time it was launched, Vanguard 1 was a bold undertaking and a commitment to our connected future. But today it also represents something else—a reminder of the work we have to do to address orbital debris.

Since 1957 humanity has put about 10,000 satellites into the sky. More than half of those satellites are now defunct. Many of them were launched with the understanding that they were cheaper to just abandon than take out of orbit.

That means that like Vanguard 1 they stay in orbit for decades, careening around our increasingly crowded skies as space junk. That's bad because it raises the risk of collisions that harm satellites we count on, makes it harder to launch new objects into higher orbits, and even has environmental consequences back on Earth.

For years, it has been the recommended practice for satellite operators to deorbit their spacecraft within 25 years of completing their missions. But 25 years is a long time. There is no reason to wait that long anymore, especially in low-Earth orbit. Our space economy is moving fast. The second space age is here. For it to continue to grow, we need to do more to clean up after ourselves so space innovation can continue to respond.

That brings me to right now. With an eye to the future, today we adopt rules that shorten this period for satellites in low-Earth orbit from 25 years to five years. That's big. It will mean more accountability and less risk of collisions that increase orbital debris and the likelihood of space communication failures.

Thank you to my colleagues for joining me and taking this important step to adopt this first-of-its-kind adjustment to our rules. Thank you also to the expert staff who worked on this effort, including Alexandra Horn, Samuel Karty, Karl Kensinger, Sankar Persaud, Tom Sullivan, Troy Tanner, Merissa Velez, and Patrick Webre from the International Bureau; Linda Chang, Thomas Derenge, Georgios Leris, and Joshua Smith from the Wireless Telecommunications Bureau; Raphael Sznajder, and Ashley Tyson from the Enforcement Bureau; Damian Ariza, Nicholas Oros, and Thomas Struble from the Office of Engineering and Technology; Jerry Duvall, Kate Matraves, Emily Talaga, and Aleks Yankelevich from the Office of Economics and Analytics; Deborah Broderson, David Konczal, and Bill Richardson from the Office of General Counsel; and Maura McGowan and Joy Ragsdale from the Office of Communications Business Opportunities.