

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER GEOFFREY STARKS**

Re: *Schools and Libraries Universal Service Support Mechanism*, Report and Order, CC Docket No. 02-6 (January 27, 2022).

Two decades of E-Rate investment have helped transform libraries into modern hubs for online life, providing access to education, healthcare, and employment. But for too long, many Tribal libraries have been left out due to limitations in our rules. A new survey conducted by the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums reveals that only 12 percent of these essential institutions have ever applied for E-Rate support.¹ There are clearly barriers to be removed. Expanding E-Rate’s reach among Tribal libraries is especially important because—as I have seen—these institutions are often the only source of free public internet access in their communities.² With that goal in mind, I am pleased support today’s Report and Order, which will update E-Rate’s definition of “library” to clarify that Tribal libraries are eligible for support.

Furthermore, ATALM’s research also revealed that eligibility is only part of the problem: 38 percent of respondents were unfamiliar with the E-Rate program altogether.³ Thanks to numerous thoughtful comments and suggestions, today’s Order also empowers the Commission to create new outreach measures, which will ensure that Tribal libraries receive the necessary tools for full participation. And it mandates the development of improved participation measurements—an essential element to ensure the ongoing success of the E-Rate program. These are critical steps.

I am grateful to the Commission staff who have developed this item and for the suggestions of the commenters who responded to the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking. This decision has my full support.

¹ American Library Association and the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, & Museums Comments at 3 (ALA and ATALM).

² Universal Service Administrative Co., *Broadband Funding for Tribal Libraries: Schools and Libraries (E-rate) Program*, Universal Service Administrative Co. (2016), <https://www.usac.org/wp-content/uploads/e-rate/documents/training/ATALM-Presentation.pdf>.

³ ALA and ATALM Comments at 3.