

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER ANNA M. GOMEZ**

Re: *Accelerating Wireline Broadband Deployment by Removing Barriers to Infrastructure Investment*, WC Docket No. 17-84, Fourth Report and Order, Declaratory Ruling, and Third Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (December 13, 2023).

Utility poles are the unsung heroes of broadband deployment. In addition to bringing communities electricity, cable, and telephone service, these often-overlooked poles play a critical role in enabling efficient and widespread access to high-speed internet access service. Pole attachments are especially critical in rural areas—areas that are typically the hardest to serve and the last to be connected. Aerial deployment is often considered the fastest way to deploy broadband Internet access service and the most cost-effective. And while the idea of a “pole” may sound simple—I can assure you that it is anything but that.

We’ve just seen the largest investment in broadband in our nation’s history and to ensure that this funding connects everyone in America to high-speed Internet, we are going to need a lot of partners, but in particular utilities companies. That is because these utility poles are often owned and controlled by the local electric or telephone companies. We must ensure that the infrastructure is in place and our rules are streamlined so that broadband can be deployed as quickly and as cost-effectively as possible.

This item brings us one step closer to meeting the moment and ensuring that everyone, everywhere in America has access to high-speed broadband Internet access service. Today’s action takes important steps to increase transparency and provide clarity to pole owners and attachers, so that we are decreasing deployment times and reducing costs. Balancing the needs of both pole attachers and pole owners is crucial for a thriving and competitive telecommunications landscape, and this item strikes the right balance.

Thank you to the Chairwoman for her leadership on this item, and ensuring that we have policies that strike a fair balance by recognizing the legitimate interests of both pole owners and attachers. Thank you as well to the Wireline Competition Bureau and the Enforcement Bureau for their work on this item.