STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER GEOFFREY STARKS

Re: *Establishing a 5G Fund for Rural America*, GN Docket No. 20-32

        Wireless devices deliver more than just convenience. They're also a means of finding work, doing the job you already have, acing schoolwork, and accessing healthcare, financial services, and emergency services. That's why I've long said that when we talk about making quality, affordable broadband available to every American—finally cracking the digital divide—advanced wireless services are and will remain an important part of the conversation.

        That's why I'm proud to support today's action on the 5G Fund. When we first established the 5G Fund, I highlighted that "it's important we get every last drop out of our Universal Service dollars." I noted that the process for allocating those dollars efficiently and fairly "starts with gathering adequate data" that does not risk leaving rural communities behind. Thanks to bipartisan leadership in Congress and the hard work of so many here at the FCC, we now have vastly improved broadband mapping that provides a more accurate picture of where wireless coverage exists, and at what speeds, and where greater support is needed. So today, we propose rules to leverage that clearer data in determining which areas are eligible for receiving support in our reverse auction. Armed with that better data, we also take a second look at key aspects of the program, including speed and technology thresholds for eligibility. Importantly, we also explore the future of mobile support mechanisms in the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. With these combined efforts, we're clearing the way to finally deliver on a more-than decade-long commitment to fund the next phase of mobile deployments in rural America.

        Finally, I'm pleased that we're also taking steps to keep our funded networks secure. In other proceedings, I've fought hard to ensure that carriers receiving high-cost support observe baseline cybersecurity and supply chain risk management requirements. I asked that we propose similar requirements for this high-cost program as well. Rural consumers have already experienced the risks posed by insecure equipment in their wireless networks, including ones funded by universal service dollars. In fact, due to a shortfall in rip-and-replace funding, some rural folks are still living through those threats today. Managing cyber and supply chain risks no doubt will be an ongoing process. But this time around, let's do what we can to get the security piece right from the start.