STATEMENT OF
CHAIRWOMAN JESSICA ROSENWORCEL

Re: *Schools and Libraries Cybersecurity Pilot Program*, WC Docket No. 23-234, Notice of Proposed
          Rulemaking (November 8, 2023).

Connected technologies power our schools and libraries. They support education, research, and training. They assist with administration. They are essential for resource and data management. But for all the strengths of these technologies, they can also introduce new security vulnerabilities. If you need evidence, consider the cyberattacks on urban and rural school networks during the last several years. These intrusions have affected districts across the country, including in California, Iowa, New York, and Wisconsin. Schools in these states have been targeted with ransomware attacks, resulting in everything from network malfunctions to student privacy vulnerabilities to unexpected expenses to get their systems back online.

The Federal Communications Commission has a role to play here. That's because these cyberattacks can undermine the connectivity that schools and libraries count on day-in and day- out. Plus, for many of these institutions, this connectivity is delivered by E-Rate, the program that for more than a quarter of a century has supported communications for schools and libraries across the country. E-Rate also has provided limited support for basic firewall services. But the scale of recent cyberattacks on these institutions suggests that this is a problem that is too big and complex for one agency to handle alone. It requires thoughtful action and careful consideration. So in order to find the right way to tackle this problem, we are proposing to establish a pilot program to support cybersecurity services for schools and libraries. With this pilot program, we aim to better understand these issues and how the FCC can leverage its resources to help address evolving cyber threats.

A central theme that we will explore is how to balance this in light of the complementary work of federal agency partners, like the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency and the Department of Education, that have greater experience and other programs in this area. And we are proposing to establish the pilot program within the Universal Service Fund but separate from the E-Rate program. We think this is the best approach to make sure gains in enhanced cybersecurity do not come at the cost of undermining E-Rate's success in promoting digital equity and basic connectivity. This is critical. Moreover, we have experience doing it this way because we are modeling this initiative on another FCC program from a few years ago known as the Connected Care Pilot Program. Ultimately, we want to learn from this effort, identify how to get the balance right, and provide our federal, state, and local government partners with actionable data about the most effective and coordinated way to address this growing problem.