

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER ANNA M. GOMEZ**

Re: *Safeguarding and Securing the Open Internet*, Docket No. 23-320, Declaratory Ruling, Order, Report and Order, and Order on Reconsideration (April 25, 2024)

As of today, April 25, 2024, I have been an FCC Commissioner for seven months. In the past seven months, I've had the privilege of meeting with stakeholders, industry, civil rights and public interest groups, and members of the public. I've met with advocates who support today's item, and advocates who don't. I've met with people across the country, who emphasize just how necessary their broadband Internet connection is to their everyday lives.

- I've heard from Veterans and Care Providers that 80% of medical treatment for recovery requires a broadband connection.
- I've heard from parents, students, and teachers, that a broadband connection is necessary to complete much of the homework assigned to students.
- I've heard from consumers about the importance of a broadband connection for keeping in touch with friends and family, particularly to those who live abroad.
- I've received messages from parents who are concerned about losing their broadband connection, and what that will do to the economic opportunity of their family and kids.
- I've heard from first responders that having a reliable broadband connection, especially in times of emergency, can save lives and speed up recovery efforts.

So, I will start with the thing on which we all agree: broadband access to the Internet is a critical conduit that is essential for modern life. *We all agree.* And, as a nation, we have recognized the importance of connectivity and have made a historic multi-billion dollar investment in broadband for all. Despite this unanimous agreement of the importance and value that this critical infrastructure plays in our modern society, since 2017, there has not been a federal framework in place to protect and secure the integrity of our networks. We've had a patchwork of state net neutrality rules that have upheld the foundation, yet, there is no expert agency ensuring at a national level that the internet is open and fair.

Protecting this critical infrastructure that is essential to the safety, economy, health, education, and well-being of this country is good public policy. The value is so great, that we cannot wait for the flood to arrive before we start to build the levee. That would leave us woefully behind in an increasingly digital world where this critical resource is constantly at play.

That is why what we are doing here today is so important. Today, we reinstate appropriate guardrails to ensure that this critical conduit remains accessible and secure for all. We restore FCC oversight of broadband Internet access, the essential telecommunications service of this century, with bedrock authority in Title II of the Communications Act.

I want to be very clear about what we are doing. Today, we reinstate guardrails to safeguard and secure broadband infrastructure, to protect consumers, and to ensure that the Internet remains open and available to all content providers and consumers. We return to legally sustainable rules that track those that have been upheld in court, and affirm the principles that have governed the growth of the Internet since 1998.

This is not about controlling Internet content. It is not about stifling investment, regulating rates, or reducing competition. It is not about controlling the Internet.

Instead, the rules we adopt today ensure that access to the Internet remains open, safe, and secure. These rules ensure that all viewpoints—including ones with which I disagree—are heard, without discrimination. More so, these rules protect consumers while also maintaining a healthy competitive broadband Internet ecosystem, because we know that competition is required for access to a healthy, open

Internet that is accessible for all. They ensure that the next generation of innovators and start-ups have the same opportunities that the large tech companies of today had when they were starting out in garages and dorm rooms. Our goal is to implement this framework that continues to encourage innovation and the investment we've seen while net neutrality policies were in place prior to 2017, and the continued massive investment after 2017 when states stepped in and implemented a patchwork of rules in response to the elimination of federal protections.

The framework we adopt today is balanced and reflects the feedback that the Commission has received from stakeholders and consumers. It adopts a framework that is tried and true, and reinstates similar rules to those that were in effect for providers between 2015 and 2017. We understand that smaller providers are the backbone of Internet access in many rural and underserved areas, and our approach is crafted with their vital role in mind. We've taken special consideration of smaller providers by exempting these providers of certain transparency requirements, and temporarily forbearing from certain foreign ownership requirements.

Most importantly, I support today's item because it prioritizes consumers and gives the Commission more tools to close the digital divide. It ensures that consumers are in charge of what they do online and that they can be confident that when they send information over their broadband connection, it will not be blocked or altered by their provider. These protections are essential for all consumers, but especially for those communities who have been historically left on the wrong side of the digital divide.

Thank you to the many advocates, stakeholders, and members of the public who provided feedback and participated in this proceeding. My staff and I met with over 45 parties, and appreciated hearing all of your feedback. The item that we adopt today is stronger because of these meetings.

And thank you to the staff throughout the agency for their work on this item, and to the Wireline Competition Bureau for leading the effort.