

**STATEMENT OF  
CHAIRWOMAN JESSICA ROSENWORCEL**

Re: *Mitigation of Orbital Debris in the New Space Age*, IB Docket No. 18-313

Today we take the next step in our Space Innovation agenda. We make clear we are supporting sustainable skies and a growing space economy.

Both of these things matter—and to understand why, a little history helps. It was roughly six decades ago that the first space age took off. Since that time, humanity has put more than 10,000 satellites into our skies. More than half of those satellites are now defunct. Many of them were launched with the understanding that the heavens were vast and we could just abandon these devices circumnavigating the globe. At the time, we thought it was cheaper to do that than take this debris out of orbit. But we were wrong.

We know this now because the second space age is here—and it is an opportunity to get this right. At the moment, we have applications for more than 56,000 satellites pending before this agency. That is more than five times the number launched since the beginning of the first space age. So if we want space activity to continue to grow, we need to care for our skies and make sure operators clean up after themselves. This is because when defunct devices are left up in orbit, it increases the risk of collision and malfunction in every system that counts on satellites. Orbital debris degrades the environment for all future space activity. So the policies we put in place to address it matter.

To demonstrate this, let me offer an example of just how dangerous it is to leave debris in our skies. Consider the story of a single screwdriver. Four decades ago, a screwdriver slipped out of an astronaut's grasp. It has been circling in low earth orbit at up to 21,600 miles an hour ever since. That is ten times faster than a bullet with the punch of a hand grenade. So even an innocuous screwdriver in our skies can wreak havoc.

At the FCC, we address satellites and not screwdrivers. But the example is still potent. It makes clear that if we are in the business of authorizing space activity with satellites, we need to do so in a way that decreases the risk of collision and increases opportunities in space.

This is why as part of our Space Innovation agenda, the FCC put in place rules that reduce by 80 percent the amount of time satellite operators have to deorbit retired satellites. To understand what this means in practice, it used to be that operators of low-earth orbiting satellites could just leave them in our skies for 25 years after their useful life. We have cut that time down to five years. This is big because it helps reduce the risk of collisions that can cause space communications failures.

It is also why as part of our Space Innovation agenda, the FCC is holding operators accountable when they do not comply with our orbital debris policies. In fact, last year we announced the first-ever enforcement action against a company for its failure to comply with a satellite de-orbiting plan.

It is also why we are taking this action today. In this decision we reaffirm the updates we made earlier to our orbital debris mitigation rules and offer additional guidance for satellite operators deploying their systems. Among other things, we provide clear examples to assist with compliance with reporting requirements for maneuverability and the use of detachable deployment devices. In short, we are reinforcing our commitment to space sustainability. That is because it is a fundamental part of our Space Innovation agenda.

But we are not stopping here. We recognize supporting the second space age means more than just addressing future satellite debris, it requires cleaning up existing debris. That is why yesterday I shared with my colleagues a new proposal for licensing space stations engaged in in-space servicing, assembly, and manufacturing. This framework will include support for a range of new technologies,

including ones that will help collect and remove space debris. I look forward to working with them on its adoption.

Thank you to staff behind this effort, including Julie Kearney, Troy Tanner, Karl Kensinger, Scott Mackoul, Jeanette Kennedy, Merissa Velez, Guillermo Belt, Jeanine Poltronieri, Alexandra Horn, Samuel Karty, and Sankar Persaud from the Space Bureau; Jason Koslofsky, Josh Zeldis, and Neal McNeil from the Enforcement Bureau; and Anjali Singh, Chin Yoo, David Konczal, and Deborah Broderson from the Office of General Counsel.