STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER ANNA M. GOMEZ

Re: *Authorizing Permissive Use of the "Next Generation" Broadcast Television Standard*, GN Docket No. 16-142, Fifth Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (Oct. 28, 2025).

Technical standards matter. Sometimes we think about them when need to make sure we have the right kind of charging cord for our phones and we often don't, such as how we all expect that our laptop chargers will work in the electrical outlets wherever we travel within the United States. The fact that we need converters to charge most of our personal electronics in other countries is the result of differing technical standards.

Every television you purchase in the United States has the ability to be turned on and receive signals from locally broadcasting television stations through its built-in antenna. While many of us subscribe to cable, satellite or streaming services that deliver the same content via a competing technology, there is still a significant segment of the public that receives their television content over the air for free. The ability of televisions to receive and translate broadcast signals for public consumption is fundamental to the public benefits that television broadcasting is intended to provide. This service depends on broadcasting standards.

Television broadcasting has been through multiple standards transitions, from black and white to color and from analog to digital. The ability of the viewing public to continue to receive their free over-the-air broadcasting signal on the equipment they already own has been paramount each time.

The media ecosystem is changing rapidly, much of that is technological, in that we get news and information through streaming platforms as well as applications on our phones. But other significant changes are impacting the underlying economic model. The advertising economy that supports free over the air television is subject to an ever-broadening array of competitors.

Within the media ecosystem, however, television broadcasting serves as a key element of the United States' civic infrastructure that keeps our democracy strong because the heartbeat of what they do is local journalism. Throughout my time as a commissioner I have travelled around the country meeting with stakeholders in the industries we oversee, and almost everywhere I went I have visited with a local television broadcaster and I have been able to do so because there are local broadcasters almost everywhere serving their local communities. I am consistently amazed by local journalists' commitment to serving their communities and their passion for their work.

The ATSC 3.0 or NextGen TV standard is about taking digital television to the next level. Television is moving to an IP-based format that supports features and functionalities that will allow broadcasters to compete more effectively with digital platforms both on content and economics.

I strongly support this evolution and the continued competitive viability of local broadcasters. That said, there are some very complicated questions that this current transition raises. First and foremost is the issue of timing. NextGen TV is not backwards compatible. What that means is that many televisions being sold in the United States today do not have NextGen TV antennas and are unable to receive a NextGen TV signal in the event a station stops broadcasting in ATSC 1.0.

Unlike the digital transition in 2009, this transition was not dictated by congress and there is currently no funding to support a nationwide education campaign and the provision of NextGen TV tuners to ensure all consumers that want it have the technology to receive broadcast television on their existing equipment. Consumers have purchased over 14 million ATSC 3.0-capable sets and 300,000 external 3.0 converters that will allow them to receive NextGen TV signals. While those are big numbers, these televisions are in a small fraction of the households in the United States.

This item proposes to give the individual broadcasters the right to decide when they want to do a "flash-cut" to NextGen TV. While we are dealing with a chicken or the egg problem, I am concerned about the consumers that will be either unaware of the transition before it happens or unable to afford the necessary equipment to continue to receive the services, including emergency notifications, on which they rely. I am interested in seeing whether there are alternative ways to facilitate the transition to NextGen TV that would minimize the potential negative impact on consumers.

And there are additional thorny questions that the Commission is going to have to address. Consumers are clearly concerned about the use of encryption technologies also referred to as digital rights management. This impacts both whether audiences will be able to continue to enjoy free over the air television as they do today and the impact of privately established standards on the equipment market. Technology should not be a bottleneck to innovation.

And there are significant costs of the transition as well. Costs will be borne by manufacturers that will need to add technology to televisions to receive this broadcast, cable and satellite providers that will need to change their equipment to receive the NextGen TV signals, and consumers that will need to purchase antennas for their existing TVs to receive the new signal over the air or potentially pay higher prices for new televisions.