

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER OLIVIA TRUSTY**

Re: *Promoting Fair and Open Competitive Bidding in the E-Rate Program Schools and Libraries Universal Service Support Mechanism*, WC Docket No. 21-455, CC Docket No. 02-6, Report and Order and Order on Reconsideration, (Apr. 30, 2026).

Universal connectivity is a foundational principle of the Communications Act and the cornerstone of our mission.

Federal communications law rightly underscores the particular importance of ensuring reliable connectivity for schools and libraries. In my travels, I have seen first-hand how critical these connections are, especially in remote communities, like Bethel and Eek Alaska.

The E-Rate program plays a vital role in advancing this objective. Therefore, sound program administration requires not only strong safeguards, but also a commitment to reducing unnecessary regulatory burdens and streamlining processes that have outlived their usefulness. I am pleased this item takes meaningful steps to update the E-Rate program with those goals in mind.

At the same time, the Commission must remain a vigilant steward of universal service funds by guarding against waste, fraud, and abuse. The FCC has made significant progress on that front. In 2017, the Government Accountability Office identified the need for improvements to E-Rate program integrity following elevated levels of improper payments between 2014 through 2019.¹ The Commission responded with reforms, and a December 2025 GAO report found that the E-Rate program had adopted key practices and procedures designed to mitigate funding program risks.²

As program participants themselves recognize, that progress does not mark the end of our responsibility. Rather, it underscores the importance of carefully weighing whether new requirements will deliver benefits that justify their costs – not only the costs for E-Rate participants, but also for the contributors who ultimately fund new program integrity measures.

In this instance, I am persuaded that the item seeks to strike an appropriate balance with respect to the creation of a new competitive bidding portal. As the item notes, several state and local governments have implemented similar systems to advance their own procurement objectives. Drawing on those experiences, this portal is designed to reflect the specific oversight needs of the E-rate program while promoting greater transparency and consistency in federal oversight of the bidding process.

The details of implementation and enforcement will be critical to the portal's success. The item establishes a framework to incorporate stakeholder input into the design and operation of the system before it becomes mandatory. It also provides flexibility for subsequent clarifications and adjustments based on real-world experience. The benefit of stakeholder input also is reflected in the clarifications provided in this Order, which should help facilitate compliance. Importantly, this item should not result in a “gotcha” approach to enforcement against program participants acting in good faith to comply during the portal's rollout. It makes clear that the Bureau must account for a reasonable learning curve when evaluating waiver requests, particularly for procedural or administrative errors by smaller or more rural participants.

¹ GAO, *FCC Should Take Action to Better Manage Persistent Fraud Risks in the Schools and Libraries Program*, GAO-20-606 (Sept. 2020), <https://www.gao.gov/assets/d20606.pdf>.

² GAO, *Selected Programs Did Not Fully Include Identified Practices to Enhance Oversight and Fraud Prevention*, GAO-26-107444 (Dec. 2025), <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-26-107444.pdf>.

On balance, I am persuaded that this item remains mindful of both the need to ensure program integrity while avoiding unnecessary burdens. I thank the Wireline Competition Bureau for their hard work on this item.