

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER OLIVIA TRUSTY**

Re: *Ensuring Children’s Safe Use of Screens and E-Rate-Funded Services; Modernizing the E-Rate Program for Schools and Libraries; Establishing the Emergency Connectivity Fund to Close the Homework Gap; Promoting Fair and Open Competitive Bidding in the E-Rate Program*, WC Docket Nos. 26-133, 13-184, 21-93, 21-455, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, (June 25, 2026).

As we celebrate the upcoming 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, I am reminded that one of our Founding Fathers, Benjamin Franklin, played a role in two other notable American firsts that are relevant to today’s item.

Early in his academic career, Franklin attended Boston Latin School, widely regarded as the first public school in what would become the United States. His commitment to learning stayed with him throughout his life. When a small Massachusetts town renamed itself “Franklin” in hopes of receiving a donation from its favorite namesake, Franklin sent them books. Those books became the foundation of what is often recognized as America’s first free public lending library.

Schools and libraries have long been pillars of education and opportunity in this country. Since the enactment of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, the E-Rate program has helped support that mission. Some analyses indicate that 96 percent of public schools nationwide receive E-Rate support.¹ Libraries likewise remain vital community institutions, counting more than 800 million visits in 2023,² and providing access to digital learning tools, online resources, creative studios, and research databases.

Access to digital learning tools in schools and libraries *can* be beneficial to children when used in moderation. They can support academic training, teach responsible online behavior, and prepare the nation’s youth for eventual employment. Schools and libraries can also play an important role in preparing children for a future in which AI literacy will be a necessary skill for full participation in the digital economy.

Notwithstanding the virtues of digital learning tools, the health and well-being of America’s children should come first and guide the extent to which they engage with certain technologies. This administration has recognized that as a priority. Initiatives like First Lady Melania Trump’s “Fostering the Future Together Global Coalition” will help young people develop essential digital skills, including AI literacy, in safe learning environments that protect them from online dangers.

These safe learning environments can include a reduction in prolonged screen exposure as well. Importantly, we cannot ignore growing concerns about the effects of excessive screen use. The Surgeon General has warned that excessive screen time is associated with negative educational, developmental, and health outcomes for school-aged children. State and local leaders have taken note, with many jurisdictions adopting policies that limit technology use during the school day in an effort to improve student welfare and academic performance.

Keeping these issues in mind, along with changing technology and marketplace dynamics, the Commission has a responsibility to periodically review the E-Rate program to ensure it faithfully implements our statutory directives. In the record, I encourage E-Rate advocates to thoroughly explain how the program can focus on the most pressing connectivity needs of schools and libraries while taking into account state and local policy developments spurred by emerging research on effective learning

¹ John Harrington, *E-rate Keeps Schools and Libraries Connected*, <https://www.fundsforlearning.com/news/e-rate-keeps-schools-and-libraries-connected/> (Sept. 10, 2025).

² Institute of Museum and Library Services, *Public Libraries Survey*, PLS Benchmarking Tables, Table 14, <https://www.ims.gov/research-evaluation/surveys/public-libraries-survey-pls>.

environments.

Finally, I appreciate that this item highlights many specific issues the Commission will need to confront as this proceeding moves ahead to remain grounded in universal service principles established by Congress.

I thank the staff of the Wireline Competition Bureau for their hard work on this important item.