

**STATEMENT OF  
CHAIRWOMAN JESSICA ROSENWORCEL**

Re: *Affordable Connectivity Program, Emergency Broadband Benefit Program*; WC Docket No. 21-450, 20-44, Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (January 14, 2022).

It was a little less than a year ago when the Federal Communications Commission did something truly historic. It set up the largest-ever broadband affordability program in the United States—the Emergency Broadband Benefit. It was a short-term effort designed to help households struggling in the pandemic get high-speed Internet access at home. And thanks to this program, more than nine million were able to do so.

Today, the agency makes history again. We put in place a long-term effort to keep households everywhere connected—the Affordable Connectivity Program. This \$14.2 billion investment, a byproduct of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, is the biggest program we have ever had to help ensure that every family can afford the broadband that is now essential for full participation in modern life.

So much of our day to day—work, education, healthcare and more—has migrated online. As a result, it’s more apparent than ever before that broadband is no longer nice-to-have, it’s need-to-have, for everyone, everywhere. But there are far too many households across the country that are wrestling with how to pay for gas and groceries and also keep up with the broadband bill. This program, like its predecessor, can make a meaningful difference.

So what does this new program bring to the table? The Affordable Connectivity Program helps reduce the monthly cost of internet service for qualifying households around the country. Eligible households can receive discounts of up to \$30 a month for broadband service, and up to \$75 a month if the household is on Tribal lands. Eligible households also are able to receive up to \$100 to offset the cost of a computer or tablet.

The best part is that the transition to this more permanent program is already underway. Congress directed the agency to begin this effort at the end of last year and created a glide path for households in the existing Emergency Broadband Benefit to move into the Affordable Connectivity Program. This means, under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, for a two-month period these households will continue to receive support of up to \$50 a month for their broadband connection. Recognizing that this entails a benefit reduction in March of this year, my colleagues and I were able to develop thoughtful guiderails for the transition of these households that put a premium on notifying them about this change and gives them the opportunity to adjust their services to avoid surprise charges or unexpected bills.

Congress also made a few key changes to the way a household qualifies for support. As a result, in our decision today, we updated the income qualifications for this program, which will open the door for more families to receive support. We also added new qualifications, including participation in the Department of Agriculture’s Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, which is specifically designed to help low-income pregnant, postpartum, and breastfeeding women and their families who are at nutritional risk.

These changes are important, but it is just as important to note that in the Affordable Connectivity Program households participating in Lifeline, Medicaid, SNAP, and Federal Public Housing Assistance programs remain eligible, as they were in the Emergency Broadband Benefit. In addition, households with children receiving free and reduced-price lunch or school breakfast continue to be eligible, as do Pell Grant recipients. Furthermore, households that participate in Indian Affairs General Assistance, Tribal TANF, and the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations also remain eligible.

Just like before, outreach for this program will be crucial when it comes to ensuring that eligible households that need support enroll. Community groups, faith-based institutions, schools, libraries, and

other trusted local voices are essential when it comes to getting the word out about this program. But unlike before, we now have an opportunity to support this outreach with funding. In the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, Congress provided the agency with the ability to devote resources to outreach efforts designed to enroll eligible households in the Affordable Connectivity Program. To ensure we do this in a targeted and thoughtful way, we are seeking comment on what a grant program to support these outreach efforts should look like. In addition to asking questions about how to expand outreach through this kind of initiative, the agency is seeking comment on what focused activities, messaging initiatives, and advertising would be most effective reaching those that need this program most. It is my hope we can use these efforts to expand awareness of this program, improve the enrollment process for those who qualify, and find ways to build trust in the process. Along the way, I hope we can tap into the efforts of other federal government agencies, so they too can continue to help with outreach and awareness.

With the Affordable Connectivity Program, Congress encouraged us to adopt new consumer protection policies, and today we delivered. We put in place new rules restricting abusive upselling and downselling practices so households are not required to subscribe to more or less than they need just to enroll in the program. We also made clear that credit checks and past debts are not a barrier for participation. In addition, we established a dedicated complaint process specifically for the Affordable Connectivity Program, so participants can let us know when they have run into difficulties or are not being treated right and we can take action to fix it.

Best of all, we have committed to continuing to learn from the policies and practices we have put in place. We already proved that we can be nimble and innovative with the Emergency Broadband Benefit—and now I hope we can do so on a broader scale. From our past efforts, we have learned that trusted navigators are often essential for effective outreach and assistance with enrollment. As a result, we are going to explore ways to lean on trusted government navigators at the state and local level who can help members of their community work their way through the application process. In addition, led by Commissioner Starks, we are looking to develop a pilot program to help improve outreach and facilitate enrollment for those residing in public housing. To this end, I look forward to working with federal, state, and local partners to identify ways to ensure that those who are eligible have opportunities to enroll with the broadband provider of their choosing. Thank you also to Commissioner Carr and Commissioner Simington for their ideas to improve accountability measures. I am also grateful to all of my colleagues for their swift review so that the agency could adopt these rules within 60 days, as required by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

Last but by no means least, this effort would not have been possible but for the hard work of the staff across the Commission, including contributions from the Wireline Competition Bureau, the Office of Economics and Analytics, the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau, the Office General Counsel, the Office of the Managing Director, the Office of the Inspector General, the Enforcement Bureau, and the Office of Communications Business Opportunities. I know that their deep commitment to this program is going to help ensure that it is a powerful tool to close the digital divide. In recognition of this commitment, I want to personally thank the staff who made this happen. From the Wireline Competition Bureau, I'd like to thank Pamela Arluk, Allison Baker, Micah Caldwell, Cheryl Callahan, Jessica Campbell, Rashann Duvall, Travis Hahn, Christian Hoefly, Jesse Jachman, Jamile Kadre, Jodie May, Kris Monteith, Ryan Palmer, Zachary Ross, Sherry Ross, Negheen Sanjar, David Sieradzki, Hayley Steffen, Kesha Woodward, Eric Wu, and Suzanne Yelen. From the Office of Economics and Analytics, I'd like to thank Mark Azic, Joanna Fister, Eugene Kiselev, Ken Lynch, Eric Ralph, Michelle Schaefer, Deena Shetler, and Maciej Wachala. From the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau, Robert Aldrich, Ed Bartholme, James Brown, Zac Champ, Matthew Duchesne, Barbara Esbin, Keyla Hernandez-Ulloa, Lyle Ishida, Sayuri Rajapakse, Suzy Rosen Singleton, Michael Scott, Patrick Webre, and Kimberly Wild. From our Office of General Counsel, Larry Atlas, Malena Barzilai, Jim Bird, William Dever, Andrea Kelly, Elizabeth Lyle, Rick Mallen, Brendan McTaggart, Bahareh Moradi, Linda Oliver, Karen Onyeije, Joel Rabinovitz, Bill Richardson, Paula Silberthau, Jeffrey Steinberg, Elliot Tarloff, and Chin Yoo. From the Office of the Managing Director, Thomas Buckley, Dan Daly, Tim Dates, Sunny Diemert, Sandeep Khanna, Hua Lu, Jim Lyons, Jasson Soemo, Jae Song, Mark Stephens, and Sanford Williams. From the

Office of the Inspector General, Hillary Burchuk and Eric Phelps. From the Enforcement Bureau, I'd like to thank Rizwan Chowdhry, Pamela Galant, Jeffrey Gee, Kalun Lee, and Keith Morgan. And from the Office of Communications Business Opportunities, Joy Ragsdale and Chana Wilkerson.