

**Testimony of Mignon L. Clyburn, Commissioner
Federal Communications Commission
Before the
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Energy & Commerce
Subcommittee on Communications & Technology
Oversight of the Federal Communications Commission
March 22, 2016**

Chairman Walden, Ranking Member Eshoo, distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, I am grateful for the opportunity to once again appear before you this morning.

Competition, competition, competition. It is a phrase we hear Chairman Wheeler repeat time and time again and a mantra I fully embrace. But today, I wish to preview an axiom of my own: community, community, community.

In communities all across this nation, be they urban or suburban, rural or Tribal, there is a communications divide: A divide when it comes to broadband access, affordability and infrastructure; and a divide when it comes to the speeds necessary to take advantage of all the Internet has to offer.

This lack of connectivity has placed so many of our communities at a disadvantage, that Congress and the Commission wisely decided to act by taking a few, simple steps to help bridge these chronic divides.

First, allow me to applaud the leadership of this Subcommittee under Chairman Walden and Ranking Member Eshoo, as you consider commonsense proposals to streamline and lower the costs associated with the deployment of broadband: The implementation of a “dig once” policy to deploy conduit during the construction of any road receiving federal funding. Draft legislation proposing an inventory of federal assets that could be used to facilitate the deployment of broadband. These are but two examples of why I stand ready to work with the Subcommittee to support bipartisan proposals that will speed the deployment of broadband to more Americans.

Second, I am pleased to have worked with my colleagues Chairman Wheeler and Commissioner O’Rielly collaboratively to put the rate of return carriers on a path to connect unserved households with broadband, while introducing more efficiencies into the high cost fund program. This new blueprint will complement the FCC’s other reforms to the Connect America Fund to ensure rural communities are not left behind.

Third, it is critical that once connected, broadband service is within reach. The Commission has a statutory duty, mandated by this body, to ensure that services are affordable and that low-income consumers have access to advanced services comparable to services available in urban areas. For far too long, the FCC has fallen short of this directive but I am pleased to say that the Chairman has circulated an Order to address this, and the Commission is poised to vote on March 31st to ensure that broadband services are more affordable and accessible for everyone.

Next week's vote, however, is not just about modernizing a 30-year-old program that has been stuck in an analog-age since inception. It represents an opportunity to completely overhaul an outdated framework and bring it into the information age so that the program meets the current needs of those who qualify. We tackle Lifeline's remaining vulnerabilities by establishing a neutral third party to determine eligibility. The waste and concerns perpetuated from ineligible households being on the rolls, whether through actions of providers or consumers, have been and are being fully addressed. All told, these reforms, I submit to you, put the Lifeline program on the most sound footing of any of our federal universal service programs – only eligible households can enroll, no duplicates are permitted, providers must offer robust minimum standards to receive support and administrative burdens are being reduced. We are moving from rhetoric to reality and those old talking points about wide-spread waste, fraud and abuse are no longer accurate and no longer tolerated.

Fourth, I am excited about the possibilities of 5G and its ability to fundamentally transform the way we live and interact with each other. 5G networks promise to offer much higher data speeds and substantially lower latency than today's options. These networks are also expected to support the sporadic, low-data-rate transmissions needed to deploy the "Internet of Things."

This vision of the promise of 5G is clear, but to get there, we need to ensure that commercial wireless companies have adequate spectrum and the necessary infrastructure, such as site antenna towers and base stations, to deploy that spectrum.

I believe that the best way to deploy the spectrum and infrastructure required to provide 5G services is for the industry to regularly meet with local governments and communities, find out what their specific needs are, and coordinate alongside them by affirming how 5G can actually help them address their short and long-term needs.

Finally, I want to briefly discuss the benefits connectivity brings when it comes to broadband-enabled healthcare technologies and solutions. Millions of Americans remain stuck in the digital darkness with no promise of being connected to the technological infrastructure needed to improve their lives, particularly when it comes to health and wellness care. I have visited communities and witnessed firsthand the transformative power of telemedicine, but life-changing technologies like the ones in Ruleville, Mississippi as well as the projects led by the University of Virginia Medical School and the Medical University of South Carolina are only possible, if broadband service is both available and affordable. This means, in areas where the private sector has failed to invest because the business case for deployment cannot be made, the FCC needs to do all in its power to step up and close these gaps.

Two weeks ago, Chairman Wheeler circulated a public notice that seeks comment on the current state of broadband health connectivity, including where there are critical gaps and needs. And as the future of healthcare is increasingly dependent on broadband-enabled technologies, I believe this item will highlight those necessary elements that are essential to help our nation move forward. I am closely examining the

public notice and look forward to seeing the record that develops to learn more about how the FCC may be able to help.

Working together on these and other initiatives will bring communities closer together, ensuring they are better connected and ready for the challenges facing them in the 21st century.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak with you today. I look forward to answering any questions you may have on how the FCC can achieve these goals by expanding access to communications technologies and services for all communities throughout the nation.