

**STATEMENT OF COMMISSIONER GEOFFREY STARKS
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION**

**BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS & TECHNOLOGY
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY & COMMERCE
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

JULY 9, 2024

Chairman Latta, Ranking Member Matsui, Chairwoman McMorris Rodgers, Ranking Member Palone, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

One of my highest priorities as a Commissioner has been to connect all Americans everywhere to high-quality broadband, regardless of where they live or how much money they make. On this front, I can't overstate the importance of the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). For the over 23 million American households that relied on the program, it offered them a critical opportunity to get and stay connected.

I think about Paul, a senior I met in Illinois in February. He told me his internet connection was "like air." That's the reality of how vital broadband is today.

Or Ron, a veteran who utilized his internet connection to contact Veterans Administration (VA) hospitals to set medical appointments, and more importantly, to attend virtual meetings where he could share his experience with PTSD to help empower veterans like himself.

I think of my visit to Fort Wayne, Indiana, and about the families I heard from who relied on ACP to keep their children from falling behind in school.

I remember Debra, who asked me if she was going to have to eat less food if ACP went away, because she would still need the internet – it was her link to her family and her church, otherwise hours away.

Seniors. Veterans. Vulnerable families in rural areas, tribal lands and urban spaces, and everything in between. These are the stories of ACP. People that I know.

Let me be clear, ACP is the most effective program we've had in helping low-income Americans get online and stay online. In fact, in my opinion, it has been the most successful program ever in our decades-long, bipartisan effort to solve the digital divide. We've made real progress in closing the digital divide through ACP and we cannot afford to slide backward. I look forward to working with this Committee as you consider re-funding this critical program

--

Making sure that broadband is affordable is just one piece of the connectivity puzzle. We also need to make sure that it is safe and secure. In April, we reclassified broadband internet access service under Title II of the Communications Act. A service this vital needs oversight. Broadband is in our homes and offices, powering our devices, and supporting our infrastructure. Now, we're armed with more tools to ensure network security, and in turn protect American interests.

I remain concerned about the threats to our nation's networks, but am confident the FCC's recent bipartisan actions will help protect them. Just last month, the Commission unanimously approved a proposal to require ISPs to adopt security risk management plans for their use of Border Gateway Protocol. This will help ensure that Americans' data is routed securely and accurately.

In addition, we must prioritize fully funding our rip and replace program. We've made great progress, but additional funding is needed to complete the removal, replacement, and destruction of insecure equipment and services from our communications networks. Without this funding, providers in rural America, including those that support our military installations, are perilously close to being forced to shut down. While participating in the rip and replace program they cannot update or maintain their legacy networks. They need our help to finish the job.

Network threats – including from state actors like Russia and China – are not hypothetical. America's ability to lead both abroad and here at home relies on an extension of the FCC's spectrum auction authority. Restoring the FCC's auction authority will provide the United States with the strongest foundation to compete in a global economy, drive growth and investment, enhance competition, and ensure national security.

Promoting safety and security comes in multiple forms. One of the most visible ways we do this at the FCC is by supporting and improving our emergency alert system. Just this summer, we've seen historic flooding in the Midwest. Wildfires in New Mexico and Alaska. Tornadoes in Florida, Ohio, and New York. It is essential that Americans can receive, understand, and act upon emergency alerts immediately. That's why we're requiring wireless providers to support alerts in over a dozen languages, and to support the inclusion of media – like location-aware maps – in alerts. With these new requirements, we're spurring innovation and cooperation between wireless providers, alerting authorities, and public safety advocates.

--

One of the Agency's chief missions remains protecting consumers. I'll highlight two. In March, we unanimously created an Internet of Things cybersecurity labeling program, the

“Cyber Trust Mark,” that will educate consumers about whether the connected devices they purchase meet cybersecurity baseline standards. And we are going after the junk fees that service providers tack on to customers’ bills. These proceedings are all about fundamental notions of fairness – consumers must have the ability to make informed choices.

--

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss these important issues. I look forward to your questions.