

**STATEMENT OF
ACTING CHAIRWOMAN JESSICA ROSENWORCEL**

Re: *Establishing the Emergency Connectivity Fund to Close the Homework Gap*,
WC Docket No. 21-93

Today the Federal Communications Commission sets up the Emergency Connectivity Fund. This is a big deal. It's the largest single effort in our nation's history to make sure students have access to the broadband and devices they need for school. It will help close the Homework Gap so that kids who have been locked out of the virtual classroom can go online for class and do their nightly schoolwork. Plus, it will make it possible for libraries nationwide to offer their patrons—including students—new ways to go online and bring connectivity home.

Even before the coronavirus pandemic upended so much of day-to-day life, seven in ten teachers were assigning homework that required access to the internet. But data from this agency demonstrate that one in three households do not subscribe to broadband. Where those numbers overlap is the Homework Gap.

For too long, the Homework Gap has been a troubling and persistent digital equity problem in the United States. But before this cruel virus reached us where we live, many of the students who struggled without reliable broadband at home had other options—like sticking around after class, sliding into a seat at the public library, or heading to a friend's home with a connection. However, with classes themselves moving online and the pandemic requiring us to stay home, we went from having millions of children who couldn't do online homework assignments to having millions of children who couldn't do schoolwork at all. In other words, the Homework Gap became a full-fledged learning and education gap.

According to one estimate, there are close to 17 million students who fall into this learning limbo. These children are disproportionately Black, Latino, and American Indian or Alaska Natives. They live in rural and urban communities and everywhere in between. It's a problem that unites us nationwide—and it's one we absolutely need to fix.

It's also important that we address this now. Because as we exit this pandemic, we know that education has been changed. Like so much else in our lives, it has been digitized. There are new ways of teaching, learning, researching, and collaborating that we will take with us out of this period. When we do, we need to ensure that every student gets the connectivity they need to thrive so no child is left offline.

Of all the memories and images of the past months, the one that keeps coming back to me is a viral picture of two young girls sitting outside a Taco Bell. They were sitting cross-legged on the ground with laptops on their knees, using the free Wi-Fi from the restaurant to do their schoolwork. It was heart-wrenching to see. But they were not alone. Kids elsewhere sat in cars outside of libraries to catch a signal to go online for class. Others cobbled together the connectivity they needed by doing everything from borrowing mobile phones to lingering outside of shuttered school and municipal buildings.

We should salute the grit of each and every one of these young people who found ways to go online and keep up with school. But it shouldn't be this hard—and going forward it won't.

That's because today, pursuant to Section 7402 of the American Rescue Plan Act, we set up the Emergency Connectivity Fund. This legislation provides the FCC with \$7.171 billion to help schools and libraries get people connected where they live. This means we have a terrific opportunity get devices—laptops and tablets—into the hands of students, staff, and library patrons who lack them and connect these learners to fixed or mobile broadband service at home. It means we can help address the Homework Gap and get more students and households nationwide connected to the high-speed internet service that is now needed to fully participate in education and modern life.

I want to thank each of my colleagues for reviewing these rules and providing their input on an especially fast schedule. I want to thank Commissioner Carr for putting a premium on prospective relief and encouraging stakeholder input while keeping to our tight statutory deadline. I want to thank Commissioner Starks for his creative ideas about collecting data so that we size the Homework Gap across the country and fix it once and for all. I also want to thank Commissioner Simington for his focus on remote communities and his thoughtful suggestion that rural schools and libraries would benefit from a further boost.

Last but not least, I am grateful to the expert staff of this agency, who released a public draft of this item just 50 days after the American Rescue Plan Act was signed into law and worked many nights and weekends to get us over the finish line. From the Wireline Competition Bureau, Cheryl Callahan, Zachary DiLeo, Kate Dumouchel, Justin Faulb, Gabriela Gross, Clint Highfill, Lisa Hone, Jesse Jachman, Gavin Logan, Sue McNeil, Kris Monteith, Molly O'Connor, Ryan Palmer, Carol Pomponio, Joseph Schlingbaum, Johnnay Schrieber, Greg Vadas, Adrian Wright, and David Zesiger; from the Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau, Ken Carlberg; from the Office of General Counsel, Malena Barzilai, Margaret Drake, Michele Ellison, Andrea Kearney, Elizabeth Lyle, Rick Mallen, Bahareh Moradi, Linda Oliver, Bill Richardson, Paula Silberthau, Jeffrey Steinberg, Elliot Tarloff, and Chin Yoo; from the Office of Economics and Analytics, Eugene Kiselev, Ken Lynch, Giulia McHenry, Eric Ralph, Steve Rosenberg, Don Stockdale, Emily Talaga, Shane Taylor, and Aleks Yakelovich; from the Office of Managing Director, Regina Brown, Tim Dates, Sheela Kailasanath, Sandeep Khana, Hua Lu, James Lyons, Timothy Siekierka, Jasson Soemo, Jae Song, Mark Stephens, Virginia Tucker, Cara Voth, and Pat Wolan; from the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau, Robert Aldrich, Diane Burstein, Daryl Cooper, Matthew Duchesne, Barbara Esbin, Derik Goatson, Elliot Greenwald, Sayuri Rajapkse, Michael Scott, Suzy Rosen Singleton, and Patrick Webre; and from the Office of Inspector General, Hillary Burchuk, Jeffrey Dickey, and Sharon Diskin. They are deeply committed to improving digital equity and all-star public servants.