

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER NATHAN SIMINGTON**

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

It is my pleasure to vote to approve the Report and Order establishing the Emergency Connectivity Fund to Close the Homework Gap. The Fund's size is closely tailored to the amount estimated to be required to ensure that all students nationwide have access to broadband during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. This program will connect currently unserved students, school staff, and library patrons so that they can all engage in remote learning on a level playing field with their connected peers. This is an important part of closing the larger digital divide and will encourage broadband adoption.

I particularly appreciate the analysis and suggestions provided by the stakeholders who reached out to point out changes that needed to be made to the original draft, and to Acting Chairwoman Rosenworcel, her advisors, and the outstanding Wireline Competition Bureau team that took so many stakeholders' concerns to heart and made changes to the Report and Order as originally proposed. We particularly appreciated that the final Report and Order recognizes that the priority of this program is to serve those not yet served, while providing necessary financial support for reimbursements of necessary past spending the minute that those needs have been satisfied. Congress gave the Commission a mandate to connect currently unconnected students, and I believe that this mandate will be fulfilled in the final Report and Order.

Further, I appreciate the clarity thoughtfully added to the original draft. Two points to particularly note are the addition of standards and clarifying language on when self-construction would be appropriate, and the guardrails added for all program participants to guarantee that funds from this program will go for remote learning as intended by Congress. Changes made to clarify that the \$400 equipment cap is on reimbursements rather than prices, and language requiring additional information on broadband availability championed by Commissioner Starks, both significantly improved the Report and Order.

The final Report and Order prioritizes rural users when funds are nearing depletion, accommodates non-profit private schools and includes homeschoolers, as championed by Commissioner Carr. The inclusion of ATSC 3.0 datacasting as appropriate technology for self-provisioned systems, as requested by both Commissioner Carr and my office, is also an important addition to the Report and Order.

I also appreciated the opportunity to discuss my call for protection of school and library data. Though not included in the Report and Order, I look forward to working on this issue in future E-Rate discussions. Now, when many of our schools and library systems are suffering attacks targeting student and faculty personal data, and when critical infrastructure is more and more subject to damaging hacks and cyber-attacks, we must ensure that E-Rate support provides safe, secure technology.

The collegial process by which the Commission has jointly arrived at this final Report and Order was made particularly effective by Acting Chairwoman Rosenworcel's release of a public draft. Education is a vast field. The final Report and Order benefited from the input of a wide range of concerned parties, which could not help but refine our work at the Commission, allowed us to carefully assess the ramifications of every choice we made, and made our final Report and Order more transparent and informed than it would have been otherwise.

I fully support this Report and Order and am honored to vote for it. Thank you again for all who worked to get it into this final form. I look forward to hearing great things from this effort.