

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER BRENDAN CARR**

Re: *Schools and Libraries Universal Service Support Mechanism*, Report and Order, CC Docket No. 02-6 (January 27, 2022).

Tribal communities continue to lag too far behind other areas when it comes to connectivity. I've seen this more than a few times when I have had the chance to visit with Tribal leaders in their own communities. During a visit to the remote Pine Ridge Indian Reservation—which stretches across 2.7 million acres along the southwest corner of South Dakota—it was clear that the area's vast distances and higher than average poverty rates created obstacles for broadband access and adoption. But these challenges are not unique to Pine Ridge. From the Atlantic coastal plains to the Alaskan tundra, too many tribal communities are on the wrong side of the digital divide.

While every Tribal community has its own set of challenges, the opportunities that come via high-speed Internet connections are part of a shared story. On a visit to the Mescalero Apache Reservation in New Mexico, I saw how a broadband connection at the local hospital was enabling community members to have one-on-one video connections with world-class mental health professionals located hundreds of miles away in Albuquerque. Nearby, students at the Mescalero Apache school were leveraging an Internet connection to hone their STEM skills.

By making it clear that Tribal libraries are eligible under the E-Rate program, as the Order does, we can more effectively support the connectivity needs of Tribal communities. So I appreciate Chairwoman Rosenworcel for bringing this item to a swift vote. Additionally, I applaud Senator Luján, Senator Heinrich, and Congressman Mullin for their longstanding leadership on this issue through the Tribal Connect Act.

I also want to thank staff from the Wireline Competition Bureau and the Office of Native Affairs and Policy for their hard work on this item. It has my support.