

**STATEMENT OF
CHAIRWOMAN JESSICA ROSENWORCEL**

Re: *Establishing a 5G Fund for Rural America*, GN Docket No. 20-32, Second Report and Order, Order on Reconsideration and Second Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (August 28, 2024)

There are more than 14 million homes and businesses in the United States that lack access to modern wireless service. There are millions more people who live, work, and travel in these locations and struggle with their mobile connections. So many of the people who spend their time in these communities can tell you with pinpoint accuracy where they can and cannot get a reliable signal. They are frustrated. They see how every day that goes by without service leaves rural areas further behind and at greater risk of being disconnected from modern economic life.

At the Federal Communications Commission we have a choice. We can continue to leave tens of millions of people in this country without reliable wireless service—or we can do something about it.

Today we choose action. We choose to establish the 5G Fund for Rural America because it is time to set out a clear path forward to reach those in this country who lack adequate wireless service. Waiting any longer to modernize our approach to universal service support for wireless communications only consigns communities without signals to many more years on the wrong side of the digital divide.

We are doing this now because for the first time we have comprehensive data about the state of wireless service across the country. To put a finer point on it, we now know exactly where there are mobile dead zones. This is thanks to the extraordinary work of our Broadband Data Task Force, which has carefully used the authority we have under the Broadband DATA Act to map what areas need assistance so we can use this information to direct universal service funding going forward. That means the 5G Fund for Rural America will be data driven like nothing that has come before.

We are doing this now because the universal service support system for wireless communications needs reform. The agency has been calling for modernizing this system since 2011. In the intervening years, mobile connections have only grown more essential, not less. Continuing to rely on a system that was cobbled together for an earlier wireless era and pays for networks in areas where there is already unsubsidized 5G service no longer makes sense.

We are doing this now because the approach we adopt is thoughtful. Thanks to the input of my colleagues, the 5G Fund for Rural America will be structured in a way that offers support to homes, businesses, and roads that lack unsubsidized 5G service and prioritizes deployment of 5G mobile broadband service in areas that lack even 4G LTE service. This makes sure we are reaching both rural areas without service and those that have been shortchanged because they have only the last generation of wireless technology. We also modernize our system to improve cybersecurity and reduce supply chain risk. In addition, to facilitate the development of new secure equipment markets, we incentivize the use of Open Radio Access Networks.

We are doing this now because we have built into this framework the flexibility to take into account enforceable commitments made in other broadband programs. This is important because in the aftermath of the pandemic, Congress created many new ways to support broadband infrastructure, including the Broadband, Equity, Access, and Deployment Program at the Department of Commerce. These funds, which are distributed by states and territories, are designed to support fixed broadband deployment rather than mobile broadband. But our framework allows us to remove areas from the 5G Fund for Rural America if we are presented with evidence of enforceable BEAD commitments to deploy 5G mobile broadband. This prevents duplication and ensures our limited resources stretch further.

There is more work to do in the weeks and months ahead to make dead zones a thing of the past. We will continue to refine our maps so they reflect up-to-date data and challenges to the accuracy of reported coverage from stakeholders, governments, and the public through our new mobile speed test app. We will use decades of auction expertise to develop a state-of-the-art bidding system that will streamline the process for participants. At every step, we will ensure the 5G Fund for Rural America carefully considers the impact of other broadband funding programs so that we can maximize the reach of this effort. But by putting this framework in place now we have a roadmap. It is time to get going and use it so we can build a digital future that works for everyone.