

**STATEMENT OF
JESSICA ROSENWORCEL
COMMISSIONER
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
BEFORE THE
UNITED STATES SENATE
COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION
“EXPANDING BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE GRANITE STATE”
KEENE, NEW HAMPSHIRE
OCTOBER 13, 2017**

Good morning, Chairman Thune, Ranking Member Nelson, Members of the Committee and in particular, Senator Hassan. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today in the Granite State. I am a New England native so joining you here—back in the part of the country I call home—is an honor and a treat.

In Washington, I have the privilege of serving as a Commissioner at the Federal Communications Commission. I have a front row seat at the digital revolution. Every day I see how technology is changing every aspect of civic and commercial life. Every day I am reminded that the future belongs to the connected. No matter who you are or where you live in this country, you need access to modern communications for a fair shot at 21st century success.

But the fact of the matter is that too many Americans lack access to broadband. This includes 23 million Americans living in rural areas. This includes 15 percent of those living in rural New Hampshire. This is not acceptable. We need to do better.

But statistics like these don't tell the whole story. To get a picture of just what it means to be consigned to the wrong side of the digital divide consider kids and homework. Today, seven in ten teachers assign homework that requires broadband access. But data from the FCC show that as many as one in three households do not subscribe to Internet service. Where those numbers overlap is what I call the Homework Gap. According to the Senate Joint Economic Committee, the Homework Gap is real. By their estimate, it affects 12 million children across the country.

I am sure it affects some of them right here in New Hampshire. Because I have heard from students in Texas who do homework at fast food restaurants with fries—just to get a free Wi-Fi signal. I have heard from high school football players in New Mexico who linger in the school parking lot after games with devices in the dark because it is the only place they can get a reliable connection. These kids have grit. But it shouldn't be this hard. Because today no child can be left offline—developing digital skills is flat-out essential for education and the modern economy.

I hope that adds a human dimension to what it means to not have access to broadband. So now let me tell you what we can do about it.

First, if we want to get serious about addressing our broadband problems, we need to know exactly where those problems are most pronounced. We need better mapping. Nearly nine years ago, in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, Congress had a good idea. It created a National Broadband Map, identifying where deployment has and has not occurred. But if you check that map online now you will see that it was last updated over three years ago. In the Internet age, three years is an eternity.

You cannot manage what you do not measure. So I think it's time for a National Broadband Map that offers an honest picture of wired and wireless broadband across the country. Too often the FCC cobbles together data for each individual rulemaking and report without a comprehensive and updated snapshot of where service is and is not.

We can build this map in Washington, but it would be great if we had a clearer picture on the ground. I'm a big believer in the wisdom of crowds, so I think we should put it to the public. If you've not been able to get service, or live in an area that lacks it, help us make a map and write me at broadbandfail@fcc.gov. I've set this account up to take in your ideas. I will share every one of them with the agency Chairman—and put on pressure to do something about it.

Mapping is important because it can improve FCC work under the Communications Act. Section 254 directs the FCC to ensure “consumers in all regions of the Nation” have access to communications, with rural rates reasonable comparable to urban rates. To do so we have more ongoing universal service proceedings than I have time to talk about today. But one thing is clear: with better data we will do a better job.

Finally, I want to point out that connectivity matters not just on the ground, but in the skies. Wireless service is an essential part of digital age infrastructure. For decades, the FCC has led the world with its auction models for the distribution of spectrum licenses. We've made a lot of progress powering the mobile devices that so many of us rely on every day. But take a drive along some rural roads and you will know there is room for improvement.

It's one reason why the AIRWAVES Act from Senator Hassan and Senator Gardner is so important. It helps identify more licensed and unlicensed spectrum that can be brought to market to improve wireless broadband. On top of that, it sets up a fund whereby auction revenues will help support wireless broadband infrastructure in rural America. It's the kind of creative effort that would in time lead to more coverage on a broadband map and also help bridge the Homework Gap. It's good stuff.

Let me close by thanking you for having me at this hearing. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.