

Committee on Energy and Commerce

**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.**

Hearing on “Connecting America: Oversight of the FCC”

March 31, 2022

This is the first oversight hearing of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) since Chairwoman Rosenworcel has taken the agency’s helm, and while it was my hope to have a full, five-member Commission with us today, we are glad to have the four of you here.

I want to begin by congratulating Chairwoman Rosenworcel again on becoming Chair of the FCC, the first woman to be named to the position on a permanent basis. It is much deserved, and the work the Commission has accomplished under your leadership has not gone unnoticed.

As the chief regulator of our communications networks, it is more important than ever that the FCC prioritize protecting consumers. Over the past two years, since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, broadband and connectivity has proven essential to everyone’s lives, and that isn’t going to change. Whether it is telework, telehealth, commerce, or video calls with friends and family—high-speed, reliable broadband service is fundamental not just to our daily connections, but also economic opportunity and American global leadership.

Unfortunately, the pandemic also has highlighted the massive disparities faced by individuals and families without reliable home internet access. It is an issue that we on this Committee—Democrats and Republicans—have talked about for years. And that is why I am proud that we stood together to enact the Emergency Broadband Benefit program, which is now a long-term program known as the Affordable Connectivity Program. This new long-term program was created thanks to passage of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. As of today, the Affordable Connectivity Program is helping more than ten million households afford monthly internet service. Working together, I believe we can push that number even higher.

I am also proud that last year we invested in the educational opportunities of students by enacting the Emergency Connectivity Fund as part of the American Rescue Plan. In today’s classroom, a home internet connection is just as essential as a textbook or a pencil, and we should no longer accept that millions of students must sit in a parking lot to access this fundamental educational tool.

In my home state of New Jersey, over \$122 million in in funding has been distributed to schools and libraries to ensure that students can connect to the internet at home – allowing them to take advantage of online learning and do their homework. These funds are critical to helping fulfill the promise to our nation’s students of a quality education that can open the door to opportunity and success.

Notably, these broadband affordability programs have been implemented by the FCC on a bipartisan basis, as have other actions over the past year—actions that put the consumer first. The FCC is increasing pricing transparency by requiring the so-called broadband nutrition label to allow consumers to quickly and easily compare service plans.

It also recently adopted rules to help the millions of Americans who live in apartments and condominium buildings by promoting broadband provider competition in those buildings and opened an examination into how the outrageous practice of digital discrimination can be prevented. These are all actions that will help consumers.

The FCC's work on behalf of the public also includes its vigilance in securing our communications networks under the Secure and Trusted Communications Networks Act and the Secure Equipment Act.

We also charged the Commission with implementing the Broadband Data Act, which will be critical to ensuring we have accurate maps when it comes to distributing the more than \$40 billion Congress appropriated for broadband in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. I want to congratulate the entire Commission for your recent victory in the bid protest case at the Government Accountability Office that put a hold on some progress with respect to those maps.

Of course, I also want to note the agency's good work increasing coordination and collaboration with the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, to ensure the federal government is competently managing our spectrum and speaking with one voice on these important issues.

The FCC has accomplished a lot over the last year, but there is so much more it needs to do — especially when the agency finally has a fifth commissioner. I hope that seat is filled quickly, so the agency can reverse some of the harmful actions from the last administration. Notably, it is past time that the FCC assume its place as the agency with expertise to oversee broadband service providers and with authority to adopt rules to protect consumers who rely on broadband service now more than ever.

I again thank all four commissioners for joining us today.