

Written Statement of FCC Commissioner Mignon L. Clyburn
Before the Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Review of the FY2018 Budget Request for the Federal Communications Commission
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Good afternoon Chairman Capito, Ranking Member Coons and members of the Subcommittee. Nearly four years ago, I was honored to appear before this Subcommittee in my role as Acting Chair. Today it is my distinct pleasure to return as a Commissioner to offer my perspective on the Federal Communications Commission's Fiscal Year 2018 budget request.

We are at an unprecedented time in the FCC's more than 80 year history. The issues we are tasked with addressing are not only increasingly complex, they directly impact the everyday lives of Americans. Yet the agency finds itself tackling these issues with the fewest number of FTEs in more than 30 years. In some cases, this has created much needed efficiencies, in others it has required employees to double up on responsibilities with little or no pay increase. This not only puts at risk the quality of the final work product but it also has a direct impact on work/life balance. To put this assertion in perspective, each year the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey asks FCC employees whether they agree or disagree that they have sufficient resources to get their job done. In 2011, just over 30 percent of FCC employees disagreed with this statement. By 2016, that figure had risen to nearly 38%. So further budget and staffing cuts, will likely lead to this number increasing even further in the coming years.

Equally alarming is that an understaffed FCC undermines our core mission of protecting consumers, advancing competition and ensuring the reliability and resiliency of public safety communications. Additionally, when employees are forced to work unpaid overtime to get the job done, not only can this accelerate staff turnover or burn-out but it may force employees to violate provisions of the Antideficiency Act.

Furthermore, while not unique to the FCC, an increasing number of federal employees are eligible for retirement. Today, there are 362 FCC employees that are retirement eligible, equaling roughly 23 percent of our workforce. In practice, 124 employees have already departed the agency this year – some for retirement while others will leave for new job opportunities. During the three previous fiscal years, we lost a combined total of 441 employees. So we have no choice but to think about a future which recruits and retains the next generations' best and brightest. Former Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel once proposed an engineering honors program, modeled after the FCC's highly successful attorney honors program. I strongly support this concept and feel that it should include a pipeline for those with expertise in economics, public policy and communications.

You may have also heard me speak a lot about the need for better broadband data. This is important to me because I have heard from far too many communities that take issue with the FCC's data. They say that where our data shows there is either fixed or mobile broadband coverage, that in actuality, the service ranges from spotty to non-existent. It should not be this difficult for the expert agency to have accurate data down to the street level, for we know that

improved data will enable us to better target our infrastructure efforts and improve the accuracy of our National Broadband Map.

With this goal in mind, it should come as no surprise that I am a strong believer in the power of broadband to tackle some of our nation's greatest challenges, particularly when it comes to healthcare. Thanks to the work of the FCC's Connect2Health Task Force, we have a clearer picture of where the greatest needs exist. Specifically, we have learned that over 36 million Americans live in counties with what can best be described as a "double burden" of need, meaning there are high burdens of chronic disease and a need for or lack of adequate broadband connectivity. Chairman Pai has committed to carrying on the work of the Task Force and I am hopeful that through a sustained investment in this initiative, it will continue to fuel and inform us when it comes to broadband health policy and investment for and in rural and underserved communities.

And as the Subcommittee prepares its appropriations bill for FY18, I am also hopeful that IT infrastructure will be top of mind. We all remember the headlines of 2014, when a deluge of public comments in response to the Commission's open internet proceeding caused the FCC's website to crash. Fast forward to last month and it would seem like déjà vu all over again. With headlines like "Net-neutrality supporters cripple the FCC website again," one begins to realize we have a systemic problem on our hands. Modern IT infrastructure should be able to handle a few hundred thousand public comments without grinding to a halt. To demonstrate the agency's commitment to IT modernization and cybersecurity, future budget requests should include a dedicated sub-account supporting these critical needs.

Finally, I would like to talk about the agency's spectrum auctions program. Despite several auctions currently in development and more in the pipeline, the Commission's budget request would cut \$5.8 million from the program, representing a 5% reduction. Our auctions produce a tremendous return on investment and are a win-win for consumers, industry and the federal government. Take for example the AWS-3 auction which resulted in \$20 billion for deficit reduction, as well as full funding for other key priorities such as FirstNet. With 5G on the horizon, we cannot just think in the short-term which means providing the funding necessary to administer timely and efficiently run auctions. A sustained investment in our auctions program will help unlock the next generation of wireless broadband, giving our communities the much needed fuel for growth and sustainability and ensuring that America remains a leader in wireless innovation.

Returning to the Commission's core mission, it is a point of great disappointment to me that this FCC is on track to dismantle many of our key rules involving consumer protection and competition. Is this a prelude to a Commission that ultimately allows large companies to exist in a regulatory free-zone? The American people count on the FCC to be the referee on the field that ensures our nation's communications providers play by the rules. The FCC as referee ensures consumers have the chance to be on the winning team. But only if this agency calls the right plays will it be able to say that it is truly putting #ConsumersFirst.

Thank you once again for giving me the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.