

Separate Statement of Chairman Michael K. Powell

Re: Schools and Libraries Universal Service Support Mechanism, Second Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, CC Docket No. 02-6 (adopted Apr. 23, 2003).

The schools and libraries program has done a great deal to strengthen our Nation's network of schools and libraries. Today, due in no small part to the program, 99 percent of all public schools are connected to the Internet. To protect that success the Commission must remain vigilant in its oversight role. The Order the Commission adopts today is a first step in our continuing evaluation of ways to ensure that the schools and libraries program meets the objectives established by Congress.

Government programs tend toward complexity the longer they exist. Today's item eliminates complexity where it serves no legitimate purpose while expanding upon the existing robust protections against waste, fraud and abuse in the program. Significantly, today we adopt rules debarring persons convicted of criminal or civil violations arising from their participation in the schools and libraries program from getting back in line to seek funding from the program for a three year period.

Finally, I would note that the Commission's staff will continue to support the efforts of local, state and federal law enforcement agencies to detect and prosecute criminal behavior and punish the bad actors. The information sharing between the Commission and law enforcement authorities has led to a number of significant fraud investigations and prosecutions. These efforts will continue to root out fraudulent behavior in the schools and libraries program.