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# The Federal Communications Commission: FY2026 Performance Plan and Selected Actions

## Introduction

On May 30, 2025, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) released its 2026 Budget Estimates to Congress. The budget includes a Performance Plan for FY2026 (hereinafter “FCC Performance Plan” or “plan”). Congress may be interested in the strategic goals the FCC has set for itself, actions it identified to achieve those goals, and the agency’s progress toward those goals. If Congress wishes to take action, it could conduct oversight or consider legislation to support FCC goals and activities or to redefine or redirect FCC goals and activities.

This In Focus highlights selected elements of the four strategic goals set forth in the Performance Plan: accelerating high-speed internet builds, promoting national security and public safety, protecting consumers and promoting free speech, and enhancing efficiency and accountability and reducing waste. Selected policies and FCC actions related to these priority areas are also described. Finally, it discusses potential issues for Congress.

## High-Speed Internet Builds

The FCC Performance Plan describes the intent to expand commercial access to spectrum to bridge the digital divide, increase jobs, and grow the U.S. economy. The plan also indicates that the FCC seeks congressional reinstatement of its spectrum auction authority, which expired on March 9, 2023. Proposals to reinstate the FCC’s auction authority are pending in the 119<sup>th</sup> Congress (H.R. 1, H.R. 651).

The FCC plans to ensure access to spectrum resources for both space-based and terrestrial networks by, for example, opening more spectrum for space-based and terrestrial services, expediting satellite application review, promoting direct-to-cell service by allowing providers to operate at higher power levels, and increasing use of low Earth orbit satellites. On April 28, 2025, the FCC adopted rules intended to increase mobile capacity by “bolster[ing] innovative commercial uses in the lower 37 GHz spectrum band” to “support Internet of Things systems, wireless broadband, internet backhaul connections, and greater capacity for mobile systems.”

The FCC also plans to reduce regulatory requirements to encourage deployment of future-looking technologies by, for example, updating rules it believes will foster investments in high-speed infrastructure, encouraging transition to internet protocol (IP)-based networks, and simplifying the process and timelines to retire copper networks. On March 20, 2025, the FCC issued rules intended to facilitate the retirement of copper wire infrastructure (i.e., “local loop”) and investment in broadband infrastructure.

## National Security

The FCC Performance Plan outlines a number of goals related to national security, including reducing U.S. trade and supply-chain dependence on foreign adversaries as well as investigating and mitigating vulnerabilities to espionage and surveillance by foreign adversaries.

On March 13, 2025, the FCC established a new internal Council on National Security to further the agency’s work to reduce U.S. dependence on foreign adversaries. On May 22, 2025, the FCC also voted to formally establish a Foreign Adversary Transparency List, which includes new rules that would “formalize the identification of entities holding licenses and authorizations in the communications sector that are controlled by a foreign adversary.”

The FCC’s Secure and Trusted Communications Networks Reimbursement Program (Rip & Replace Program) sought to reimburse communications providers with 2 million or fewer customers for the cost of removing and replacing equipment from their networks that was said to pose a national security threat. Congress initially appropriated \$1.9 billion for the program in 2020 through the Secure and Trusted Communications Networks Act of 2019 (Secure Networks Act; P.L. 116-124). The original amount was short of the total funding needed. On December 23, 2024, in the Spectrum and Secure Technology and Innovation Act (P.L. 118-159, Div. E, Title LIV, §5401-5405), Congress authorized the FCC to borrow an additional \$3.08 billion from the U.S. Treasury to complete the program. On April 15, 2025, the agency announced that it had borrowed the full amount authorized under statute and made it available to program recipients.

## Public Safety

The FCC Performance Plan outlines a number of goals related to supporting the interoperability, resiliency, security, and rapid restoration of critical communications infrastructure and services, including the public safety community’s access to spectrum resources. Planned efforts related to this goal include encouraging the development of new GPS alternatives to ensure redundancy and establishing partnerships to foster research and the development of new national security and emergency preparedness communications capabilities.

To advance U.S. interests in the allocation and use of the radio spectrum and orbital resources, the FCC plans to collaborate with partners and allies to promote innovative spectrum uses, identify and resolve instances of harmful interference on an international basis, and continue implementing rules to allow satellite operators to use radio waves from terrestrial mobile partners to keep smartphone users connected outside regions of cell tower coverage, especially in remote, unserved, or underserved areas.

The FCC adopted rules intended to facilitate new satellite services by enabling satellite companies to provide “more robust direct-to-cell service by allowing providers to operate at higher power levels” and temporarily simplifying its review of certain types of earth station applications, allowing the agency to process nearly 1,000 such applications since January 2025.

The FCC also plans to promote access to modern emergency services by facilitating the transition to Next Generation 911 (NG911), which supports text, video, and data and improves location accuracy. The FCC proposed new rules on March 28, 2025, intended to ensure the reliability and interoperability of emerging NG911 networks as well as new rules intended to improve wireless 911 location accuracy and allow first responders to identify the location of people who call 911 from wireless phones.

### Consumer Protection

The FCC Performance Plan highlights planned actions to address illegal robocalls by expanding the reach of do-not-originate lists and strengthening call-blocking capabilities. The FCC also intends to pursue all available enforcement actions against providers that violate FCC rules and to conduct public outreach and education to raise awareness of ways consumers can reduce the number of illegal calls received. In February 2025, the FCC adopted new robocall blocking rules, including allowing carriers to use reasonable do-not-originate lists, and in April 2025, proposed new rules to require caller ID authentication for calls transmitted over non-IP networks.

The FCC also plans to protect consumers by promoting accessibility of mass media, emergency services, and communications services and equipment to all consumers and improve access to the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline’s text-based services (text-to-988). In February 2025, the FCC opened an inquiry on privacy issues related to text-to-988.

On April 25, 2025, the FCC announced that it was delaying indefinitely its original August 20, 2025, deadline for service providers to comply with an obligation to “protect the privacy of calls and text messages made by survivors to domestic violence hotlines.” The FCC stated that, given complex technical challenges, the agency requires more planning time to establish its database of covered hotlines. The Wireline Competition Bureau, charged with implementing the database, is projected to have 14 fewer full-time employees (FTEs) in FY2026 than it did in FY2024. The Consumer Protection Bureau will have nine fewer FTEs for that time frame.

### Free Speech

The FCC has “called on U.S. technology companies to embrace America’s free speech tradition and reject calls by European regulators to censor speech on a global scale through the [Digital Services Act].” Section 230 of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended (Section 230), however, broadly protects these companies (i.e., operators of “interactive computer services”) from liability for publishing, removing, or restricting access to online content. FCC Chairman Brendan Carr has signaled that the FCC could issue an “advisory opinion” that could limit Section 230 immunity. Some question whether the FCC has such authority, asserting that these questions must be addressed by Congress or the courts. Chairman Carr has

highlighted his activities related to speech regulation, including sending a letter to the heads of 10 U.S. technology companies asking them how they plan to, among other things, reconcile the European Union’s Digital Services Act with “America’s free speech tradition.”

### Efficiency and Accountability

The FCC has launched a deregulatory initiative that it says will reduce regulatory overreach and eliminate unnecessary regulations; alleviate regulatory burdens and achieve the FCC’s goals and objectives; and identify and terminate proceedings that are inactive, moot, or “no longer necessary in the public interest.”

In March 2025, the FCC released a public notice titled “In Re: Delete, Delete, Delete,” which asked for input on FCC rules to eliminate outdated rules. Chairman Carr said the FCC was “examining every rule, regulation, or guidance document for the purpose of eliminating unnecessary regulatory burdens” and promoting the policies that President Trump included in Executive Order (E.O.) 14192, “Unleashing Prosperity Through Deregulation,” and E.O. 14219, “Ensuring Lawful Governance and Implementing the President’s ‘Department of Government Efficiency’ Deregulatory Initiative.” On June 4, Chairman Carr announced that at the FCC Open Meeting on June 26, 2025, the commission planned to consider a proposal to eliminate 77 cable regulations.

### Potential Issues for Congress

On May 21, 2025, the House Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government held a hearing, “Oversight of the Federal Communications Commission,” focusing on the proposed FCC budget and Performance Plan. Congress is likely to continue reviewing these items and may consider changes to support or restrict the agency’s goals and actions. The following questions could be considered:

- Is the FCC Performance Plan consistent with congressional intent?
- Are there additional legislative tools that might be useful to the FCC in combatting illegal robocalls?
- With fewer FTEs in all but one bureau or office (projected to be 119 fewer from FY2024 through FY2026), how might those reductions affect, if at all, the FCC’s ability to fulfill its mission and achieve its performance goals?
- Will the FCC be able to expand the use of new satellite services, as planned for its broadband policies, without spectrum auction authority?
- What effect, if any, might requested FCC budget cuts have on emergency alerting?
- What considerations, if any, might FCC plans to eliminate regulations raise with regard to the Administrative Procedure Act?

For more detailed information about the FCC, see CRS Report R45699, *The Federal Communications Commission: Structure, Operations, and Budget*, by Patricia Moloney Figliola.

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