FCC Commissioner Pushes for Unlicensed Spectrum in 600 MHz Band

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Unlicensed spectrum advocates are trying to secure more space on the 600 MHz Band. Those advocates appear to have a common voice on the FCC as the Commission considers rules and technical guidelines for its upcoming repurpose and auction of those airwaves.

FCC Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel, speaking at a WiFiForward event [1], said the Commission needs to be creative about finding room for unlicensed spectrum in the 600 MHz Band while protecting incumbent services. She talked about considering an expanded duplex gap, finding new locations for unlicensed microphones and opening up more unlicensed use in Channel 37.

“Moreover, if we do this right, we can increase the value of licensed spectrum without diminishing the number of licenses we sell at auction,” Rosenworcel said.

Powerful names in the tech industry are also behind the push for unlicensed spectrum in the 600 MHz Band. Representatives from Google, Microsoft and Broadcom this week met with the FCC [2] to push for the establishment of 10 MHz guard bands and 11 MHz duplex gap, with sub-1 GHz wireless broadband development allowed in both. They also advocated for setting aside channels in each market for wireless microphone use and for wireless broadband operations to be permitted in Channel 37.

In March, Google asked the FCC to set aside four 6-MHz channels in the 600 MHz band for unlicensed use [3], saying some of that “beachfront property” should become “public beaches.”

Opponents to those proposals, like the WMTS Coalition, have warned [4] it would be unwise to open up sharing Channel 37 with unlicensed uses before determining possible interference with wireless medical telemetry services.

Rosenworcel said protecting low-power TV, wireless microphones and medical telemetry, and honoring the mandate to free up licensed spectrum under the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act are both possible while still focusing on unlicensed spectrum.

In addition to talking about unlicensed spectrum policy in the 600 MHz, Rosenworcel also discussed similar use in the 5 GHz Band. She applauded the FCC’s recent vote to expand flexible rules for 5.150-5.250 GHz, which she said in effect doubled the unlicensed bandwidth in the 5 GHz Band. Rosenworcel also hinted that another 120 MHz (5.350-5.470 GHz) could be made available for unlicensed use in the future by using the exclusion zone policies currently being developed for 3.5 GHz.

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