

November 15, 2017

The Honorable Ajit Pai  
Chairman  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12<sup>th</sup> St SW  
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Pai:

We write today regarding the recently proposed changes to the Lifeline program, which among other effects, will significantly limit options available to low-income veterans to secure broadband and voice service.

Since 1985, when the Lifeline Program was established under the Reagan Administration, it has provided an essential service to low-income individuals by connecting them to job opportunities, family members, emergency services, and more. President George W. Bush expanded the program in 2005 to include wireless phones, and in 2016, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) included broadband as a supported service, giving participants a better opportunity to connect with the world around them.

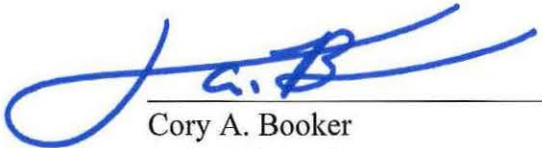
Unfortunately, recent proposals outlined by the Commission would decrease participation in the Lifeline program and stifle competition. Many Americans, including veterans, could be negatively impacted by these proposals. In an era when services for veterans are accessed more easily online, such as through the Veteran Administrations' e-Benefits program, it is imperative that those who have served our country have affordable access to broadband and voice services. Currently, 10 to 13 percent of Lifeline users are veterans. Many of them rely on Lifeline to access their education and financial benefits as well as critical health services. In August, the Trump Administration announced efforts to expand telehealth services beyond the 700,000 veterans who used them last year. These services allow veterans to book appointments online and receive diagnoses via video chat. These important and necessary advances are rendered useless however, for any of the approximately 1.5 million veterans living in poverty who do not have access to affordable broadband. The Lifeline program is a critical tool which helps connect low-income veterans and their families to the services they need.

One major area of concern is the proposal to limit carrier participation to only facilities-based providers. This change would affect 75 percent of participants who subscribe to mobile voice or broadband services provided by resellers. This means that 8.5 million current Lifeline customers could lose access to their wireless service. Limiting Lifeline to facilities-based carriers removes much of the opportunity for low-income consumers to receive subsidized wireless services. In a time when digital connectivity is increasingly important as a tool to actively engage in professional and economic activities, we must not create barriers to access. It is also important to

note that some of the nation's largest facilities-based providers have already received permission from the FCC to opt out of providing Lifeline-subsidized broadband services. This means that willing and eligible participants, including thousands of veterans, may have few to no choices when it comes to broadband, erasing much of the progress which the program has made in recent years.

We ask that the Commission consider the effects of its proposal on veterans and citizens more broadly.

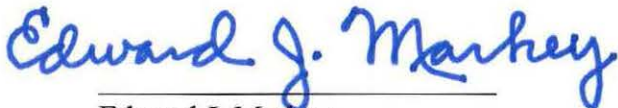
Sincerely,

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Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Richard Blumenthal", written over a horizontal line.

Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Edward J. Markey", written over a horizontal line.

Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Margaret Wood Hassan", written over a horizontal line.

Margaret Wood Hassan  
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Tammy Duckworth", written over a horizontal line.

Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator





FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF  
THE CHAIRMAN

June 8, 2018

The Honorable Cory Booker  
United States Senate  
359 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Booker:

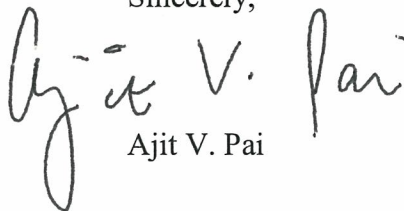
Thank you for your letter regarding the Lifeline program and the essential services it makes available to low-income veterans and their families. I am committed to bridging the digital divide, and, like you, I believe the Lifeline program can help do just that. That is why the Federal Communications Commission adopted the *2017 Lifeline Reform Order*, which seeks to focus Lifeline support where it is most needed and incentivize investment in networks that enable 21<sup>st</sup>-century connectivity for all Americans. The *Order* increased consumer choice by eliminating restrictions that barred Lifeline consumers, including veterans, from changing their Lifeline provider for a year and protected consumers by barring low-quality services that offered mobile broadband in theory but failed to do so in practice.

At the same time, I am committed to ensuring that the Commission fulfills its obligation to be a responsible steward of the Universal Service Fund. It is critical to strengthen the Lifeline program's efficacy and integrity by reducing the waste, fraud and abuse that has run rampant in this program for the better part of a decade. For example, the GAO discovered 1,234,929 Lifeline subscribers who apparently were not eligible to participate in the program as well as 6,378 individuals who apparently enrolled or recertified after being reported as deceased. That limited sample alone constituted more than \$137 million in abuse each year.

To address this, in the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking accompanying the *Order*, the Commission sought comment on a wide variety of measures to improve the administration of the Lifeline program—from re-empowering state commissions to police Lifeline carriers to partnering with states to stand up the National Verifier, from improving program audits to adopting a self-enforcing budget. We are currently reviewing the record that has been compiled in response to the Notice to determine the best path forward, and your letter has been added to that record. Please be assured that we will take into consideration the issues and concerns presented by all stakeholders as the Commission concludes its review.

I appreciate your continued interest in this matter. Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,



Ajit V. Pai



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF  
THE CHAIRMAN

June 8, 2018

The Honorable Edward J. Markey  
United States Senate  
255 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Markey:

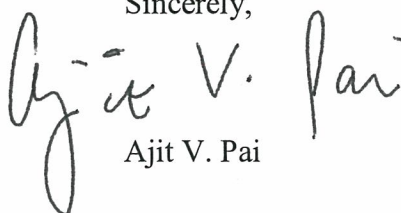
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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF  
THE CHAIRMAN

June 8, 2018

The Honorable Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senate  
G12 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Duckworth:

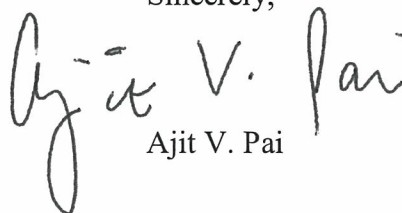
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THE CHAIRMAN

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

June 8, 2018

The Honorable Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senate  
706 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Blumenthal:

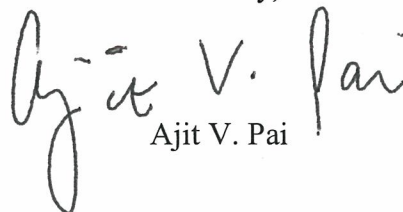
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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF  
THE CHAIRMAN

June 8, 2018

The Honorable Maggie Hassan  
United States Senate  
B85 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Hassan:

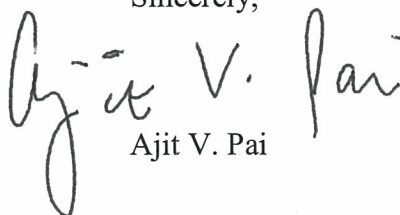
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