

**Before the
Federal Communications Commission
Washington, D.C. 20554**

In the Matter of)	
)	
Bridging the Digital Divide for Low-Income Consumers)	WC Docket No. 17-287
)	
Lifeline and Link Up Reform and Modernization)	WC Docket No. 11-42
)	
Telecommunications Carriers Eligible for Universal Service Support)	WC Docket No. 09-197
)	

**REPLY COMMENTS OF Q LINK WIRELESS, LLC
IN SUPPORT OF PETITION FOR A LIMITED WAIVER**

John T. Nakahata
V. Shiva Goel
Jason Neal
HARRIS, WILTSHIRE & GRANNIS LLP
1919 M Street NW, The Eighth Floor
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 730-1320
jnakahata@hwglaw.com

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Counsel for Q Link Wireless, LLC

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All the comments, as well as intervening experience, support Q Link Wireless, LLC’s (“Q Link”) request for the Federal Communications Commission (“FCC” or “Commission”) to grant Q Link’s petition for a limited waiver¹ to use an alternative means to obtain National Verifier confirmation of a Lifeline applicant’s eligibility in states in which “hard launch” of the National Verifier occurs prior to resolution of Q Link’s Emergency API Petition.²

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

In the month since Q Link filed the Limited Waiver Petition, two key facts have emerged that confirm the Commission should grant it. *First*, in the period in which the Wireless

¹ Petition of Q Link Wireless, LLC for a Limited Waiver to Permit Alternative Transmission of Lifeline Eligibility Information and Customer Certifications to the National Verifier, WC Docket Nos. 17-287 et al. (filed Nov. 1, 2018) (“Limited Waiver Petition”).

² Emergency Petition of Q Link Wireless, LLC for an Order Directing the Universal Service Administrative Company to Implement Machine-to-Machine Interfaces for the National Verifier, WC Docket Nos. 17-287 et al. (filed July 5, 2018) (“Emergency API Petition”).

Competition Bureau requested comments on the Limited Waiver Petition,³ no party has voiced any objection to Q Link’s requests—to the contrary, all filed comments have encouraged the Commission to grant the Petition (and to implement a longer-term solution including carrier APIs in the National Verifier).⁴ *Second*, since “hard launch” began on November 2 in the first wave of states, the consumer experience in Colorado and Utah shows that the current National Verifier interface is a serious impediment to consumer enrollment.

As Q Link has explained in the Emergency API Petition, the Limited Waiver Petition, and recent meetings with members of the Commission and with Wireless Competition Bureau staff, Q Link strongly supports the National Verifier—the proper implementation of which is essential to the success of the Lifeline program.⁵ Carrier APIs will further that goal in the long term by increasing efficiency for the Commission and for consumers while leaving eligibility determinations to the National Verifier in all cases; granting the Limited Waiver Petition will do the same in the meantime.

³ See *Wireline Competition Bureau Seeks Comment on Petition of Q Link Wireless, LLC for a Limited Waiver to Permit Alternative Transmission of Lifeline Eligibility Information and Customer Certifications to the National Verifier*, WC Docket Nos. 17-287 et al. (rel. Nov. 9, 2018).

⁴ National Lifeline Association Comments on Petition of Q Link Wireless, LLC for a Limited Waiver to Permit Alternative Transmission of Lifeline Eligibility Information and Customer Certifications to the National Verifier, WC Docket Nos. 17-287 et al. (filed Nov. 23, 2018) (“NaLA Waiver Comments”); Comments of TracFone Wireless, Inc. in Support of Q Link Wireless, LLC Petition for Limited Waiver, WC Docket Nos. 17-287 et al. (filed Nov. 21, 2018) (“TracFone Waiver Comments”).

⁵ See Letter from John T. Nakahata, Counsel, Q Link Wireless, LLC, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket Nos. 17-287 et al. (filed Nov. 8, 2018) (“Q Link Chairman Pai/Commissioner Carr Ex Parte”); Letter from John T. Nakahata, Counsel, Q Link Wireless, LLC, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket Nos. 17-287 et al. (filed Nov. 8, 2018) (“Q Link Wireless Competition Bureau Ex Parte”); Limited Waiver Petition at 3; Emergency API Petition at 1, 6.

I. ALL COMMENTERS SUPPORT—AND NONE OPPOSE—GRANT OF THE LIMITED WAIVER PETITION.

In the Limited Waiver Petition, Q Link reiterated that carrier APIs are necessary to the success of the National Verifier—they promise a more consumer-friendly experience, lower program administration costs, increased security from fraud, and greater incentives for carriers to market to rural and suburban consumers across the country.⁶ It also explained that exclusive use of the existing National Verifier interfaces in “hard launch” states pending resolution of Q Link’s Emergency API Petition would be a step backward for the Commission, the Lifeline program, and the National Verifier itself. And in seeking limited interim relief—the ability to transmit via batched bulk transfers the same documents and information the National Verifier would otherwise collect directly from consumers and state databases—Q Link explained that the Commission could facilitate carrier-assisted enrollment, provide consumers an efficient, accessible, and safe experience, and still ensure that the National Verifier makes all eligibility determinations.⁷

⁶ Limited Waiver Petition at 4-9.

⁷ *Id.* at 9-22; *see id.* at 11 (explaining the specific relief requested for (1) program-based applications where Q Link has access to a state database documenting participation in a qualifying program or Lifeline eligibility, (2) program-based applications where Q Link lacks access to such a state database, and (3) income-based applications).

In the Limited Waiver Petition, Q Link erroneously stated (at 10) that it had database access in Colorado through “hard launch.” In fact, Colorado had ended direct carrier database access earlier. Thus, Colorado is an example of a state with no carrier database access, for which Q Link would send all customer eligibility documentation to the National Verifier for review. However, Q Link did have such access in Utah, which remains an example of a state in which “hard launch” simply shifts the database dip from the carrier to the National Verifier. In any event, under the requested waiver, the National Verifier would still have to confirm eligibility for these as well.

Just as no commenter opposed Q Link’s Emergency API Petition or questioned the importance of APIs to the National Verifier’s success,⁸ no commenter has opposed or questioned Q Link’s request in the Limited Waiver Petition that the Commission provide a bridge to maintain program integrity until the Commission resolves the API issue. No commenter has identified problems with Q Link’s request to transmit data to the National Verifier via bulk transfers—and Q Link stands ready to discuss appropriate bulk data transfer methods and formatting with USAC.⁹

To the contrary, the Commission has received only support for the Limited Waiver Petition. TracFone submitted comments reiterating “the importance of API as an essential component of the National Verifier,” encouraged the Commission to “act favorably” and “soon” on the Emergency API Petition, and endorsed Q Link’s “bulk transfe[r]” solution as a bridge for carriers “[u]ntil that occurs.”¹⁰ The National Lifeline Association likewise conveyed its “suppor[t]” for “Q Link’s request for a limited waiver as an interim solution that should be granted for all Lifeline eligible telecommunications carriers . . . until the service provider API is implemented.”¹¹ And even outside the scope of comments directed specifically toward the Limited Waiver Petition, the National Lifeline Association, Sprint, and others have since filed letters adding to the already-large chorus of voices supporting the implementation of APIs to “facilitate the smooth deployment of the National Verifier.”¹²

⁸ See *id.* at 9.

⁹ See Q Link Wireless Competition Bureau Ex Parte at 2.

¹⁰ TracFone Waiver Comments at 1-3.

¹¹ NaLA Waiver Comments at 2.

¹² Letter from Norina T. Moy, Director, Government Affairs, Sprint, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket Nos. 17-287 et al. (filed Nov. 19, 2018); see also Letter from John J. Heitmann, Counsel, National Lifeline Association, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary,

Given the unanimous support on the record for carrier APIs generally and for the limited yet important relief Q Link has requested, the Commission should grant the Limited Waiver Petition without delay.

II. EXPERIENCE IN COLORADO AND UTAH SINCE “HARD LAUNCH” CONFIRMS THE NEED FOR CARRIER APIS AND FOR THE INTERIM RELIEF IN THE LIMITED WAIVER PETITION.

Facts on the ground since “hard launch” began in the first wave of states on November 2, 2018, confirm what Q Link and others have told the Commission for months—that the existing National Verifier interfaces are a serious impediment to Lifeline enrollment. Take, for example, Colorado and Utah. Since “hard launch” on November 2, Q Link has received over 8,700 applications from consumers in Colorado and over 3,500 applications in Utah, *but cannot provide services to these applicants because they have not yet qualified for eligibility through the National Verifier*. Those are thousands of consumers who expressed interest in Q Link’s services by completing applications, and whose eligibility information and documentation Q Link could have packaged, reviewed for completeness and accuracy, and transmitted to the National Verifier for a determination—but none of them have been able to obtain Lifeline services in the “hard launch” status quo. To date, Q Link has not been able to enroll any new subscribers in Colorado or Utah since “hard launch.” The same barriers to access already confront rural and suburban consumers in Mississippi, Montana, New Mexico, and Wyoming,

FCC, WC Docket Nos. 17-287 et al. (filed Nov. 15, 2018); Letter from Hon. Judson Hill, Advisor to Telscape Communications, Inc. d/b/a TruConnect, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket Nos. 17-287 et al. (filed Nov. 12, 2018); Letter from John J. Heitmann, Counsel, National Lifeline Association, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket Nos. 17-287 et al. (filed Nov. 9, 2018); Letter from Matthew Gerst, Assistant Vice President, Regulatory Affairs, CTIA, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket Nos. 17-287 et al. (filed Nov. 9, 2018).

and the same will be true in Guam, Hawaii, Idaho, New Hampshire, North Dakota, South Dakota,¹³ Missouri, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee¹⁴ once “hard launch” reaches those states.

Q Link predicted months ago that “[i]f online consumers’ only option at the time of “hard launch” is an untested, cumbersome, and redundant two-step enrollment process, then the enrollment of new rural subscribers, and the recertification of existing ones, will begin to drop shortly after that date.”¹⁵ That prediction is, unfortunately, becoming a reality.

CONCLUSION

The National Verifier has the promise to be a win-win: the Verifier can protect program integrity by determining eligibility, while carriers in a competitive environment can ensure efficient and accessible consumer-facing interactions. But the examples in Colorado and Utah demonstrate that is not where the Commission’s current path leads. The record contains unanimous support for implementing carrier APIs in addition to the existing National Verifier interfaces as requested in Q Link’s Emergency API Petition, and there is unanimous support for preserving the integrity of the program for the benefit of eligible consumers by granting the interim relief Q Link has requested in the Limited Waiver Petition. Because the National Verifier will be the arbiter of eligibility under both the long-term and short-term proposals, there will be no increase in ineligible users over the status quo. The National Verifier will simply

¹³ See *Wireline Competition Bureau Announces the Launch of the National Lifeline Eligibility Verifier in Five Additional States and One Territory*, WC Docket No. 11-42 (rel. Oct. 11, 2018).

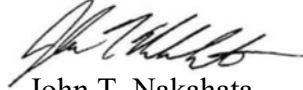
¹⁴ See *Wireline Competition Bureau Announces the Launch of the National Lifeline Eligibility Verifier in Four Additional States*, WC Docket No. 11-42 (rel. Nov. 27, 2018).

¹⁵ Reply of Q Link Wireless, LLC in Support of Emergency Petition, WC Docket Nos. 17-287 et al., at 10 (filed Aug. 27, 2018).

receive enrollee information via an API-enabled interface in the long run and via batched bulk transfer in the meantime, rather than individually through the existing interfaces, and will make the same determinations it makes now.

The Commission should expeditiously grant Q Link's Limited Waiver Petition.

Respectfully submitted,



John T. Nakahata

V. Shiva Goel

Jason Neal

HARRIS, WILTSHIRE & GRANNIS LLP
1919 M Street NW, The Eighth Floor
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 730-1320
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