

**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
)	

**COMMENTS IN SUPPORT OF
EMERGENCY PETITION OF TRACFONE WIRELESS, INC.
FOR AN ORDER DIRECTING USAC TO
ALTER THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NATIONAL VERIFIER
AND A WAIVER OF 47 C.F.R. § 54.410(d)(3) AND PETITION FOR RULEMAKING**

Commissioner Crystal Rhoades
Nebraska Public Service Commission
300 The Atrium, 1200 N Street
P.O. Box 94927
Lincoln, Nebraska 68509

December 17, 2018

REPLY COMMENTS

A number of issues with the National Verifier have come to light over the past few months. These issues are of significant concern to me as a Commissioner of the Nebraska Public Service Commission because if they are not promptly addressed by the Federal Communications Commission (the “Commission”) they threaten the ability of many low-income consumers to participate in the Lifeline program. Consequently, I submit these Comments pursuant to the Commission’s Public Notice in these matters issued on December 4, 2018.

In July 2018, Q-Link Wireless, LLC (“Q-Link”) petitioned the Commission to direct the Universal Service Administration Company (“USAC”) to implement application program interfaces (“APIs”) for the National Verifier that permit Eligible Telecommunication Carriers (“ETCs”) to exchange information regarding consumer Lifeline enrollment with USAC on a machine-to-machine basis in real time.¹ In August 2018, TracFone Wireless, Inc. (“TracFone”) petitioned the Commission to direct USAC to expedite its efforts to access key low-income program databases and to postpone the hard launch of the National Verifier in states where access to those databases had not yet been secured.² Notwithstanding those concerns, the hard launch proceeded. I expressed my support for those petitions in my “Notice of Ex Parte Communication” filed with the Commission on December 12, 2018. I do not repeat those comments here.

¹ 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, 11-42, 09-197 (filed July 5, 2018).

² Emergency Petition of TracFone Wireless, Inc. for an Order Directing USAC to Alter the Implementation of the National Verifier to Optimize the Automated and Manual Eligibility Verification Process WC Docket Nos. 17-287, 11-42, 09-197 (filed on Aug. 9, 2018).

More recently, on November 30, 2018, TracFone petitioned the Commission to direct USAC to promptly make eleven different modifications to the National Verifier and associated processes and to initiate a rulemaking proceeding to properly develop policies in four areas related to the National Verifier. At the heart of TracFone's emergency request was TracFone's valid concern that the burden associated with qualifying for Lifeline service should be proportionate to Lifeline benefit provided. Otherwise, many otherwise eligible Lifeline applicants will be deterred from enrolling in Lifeline service. I echo these concerns. The Commission and USAC must strive to prevent waste, fraud, and abuse of the Lifeline program, but waste, fraud, and abuse must be addressed through reasonable measures that are not so burdensome that they drive away Lifeline-eligible consumers.

Lifeline is important to Nebraska. In Nebraska, roughly 5,700 households use the Lifeline benefit. Lifeline allows these low-income consumers to be connected through voice and broadband service. As a member of the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners ("NARUC"), NARUC and the Nebraska Commission have a long history of support for the Lifeline program.³ Indeed, NARUC members partnered with the Commission and USAC in launching the National Verifier.⁴ NARUC and its members have actively addressed Lifeline issues, passing two resolutions associated with the Lifeline program and the National Verifier in the past twelve months.⁵ The National Verifier is critical to the Lifeline program, and

³ See Comments of National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners, filed August 10, 2018: *In the Matters of Lifeline Link Up Reform and Modernization, Telecommunications Carriers Eligible for Universal Service Support*, WC Docket Nos. 17-287, 11-42, 09-197 at 3 ("NARUC Comments"); Comments of Nebraska Public Service Commission, filed February 21, 2018: *In the Matters of Lifeline Link Up Reform and Modernization, Telecommunications Carriers Eligible for Universal Service Support*, WC Docket Nos. 17-287, 11-42, 09-197.

⁴ See NARUC Comments at 3.

⁵ See Initial Comments of the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners, filed February 21, 2018: *In the Matters of Lifeline Link Up Reform and Modernization, Telecommunications Carriers Eligible for Universal Service Support*, WC Docket Nos. 17-287, 11-42-09-197 at Appendix A, and NARUC Comments at Appendix A.

it should be consumer-friendly and streamlined to maximize Lifeline participation by eligible consumers.

I generally support all of TracFone's requests set forth in its November Emergency Petition. However, there are two that I wish to emphasize here. First, the paper application for Lifeline eligibility should be modified so that it is user-friendly for low-income consumers, many of whom are disabled, seniors, veterans, or have limited reading comprehension. The paper application, which is currently eight pages, should be reduced to one, double sided, page. The language used in the paper application should be clear and direct. Applicants should only be required to return the pages of the application that the applicant has been asked to fill out, and applicants should not be required to return pages with instructions or legal disclosures. Further, the Commission should waive the "initialing" requirement of 47 C.F.R. § 54.410(d)(3), thereby allowing consumers to *either checkmark or* initial certain boxes on the application.

Second, the Commission should remove barriers associated with consumer proof of current participation in federal low-income programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program ("SNAP") and Medicaid. For example, consumers should be permitted to prove current participation in SNAP by providing a copy of their SNAP card, without additional proof of when the SNAP card was issued or when it will expire. The same is true of Medicaid and other low-income programs.

I appreciate the Commission's prompt consideration of these important issues. I look forward to continuing to support the National Verifier and USAC so that eligible low-income consumers can continue to access the Lifeline program on a reasonable basis and receive these important benefits.

Respectfully Submitted,



Commissioner Crystal Rhoades
Nebraska Public Service Commission
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P.O. Box 94927
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