

March 16, 2015

***Ex Parte* Notice
VIA ECFS**

Ms. Marlene H. Dortch
Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Re: Lifeline and Link Up, WC Docket No. 03-109; Lifeline and Link Up Reform and Modernization, WC Docket No. 11-42; and Advancing Broadband Availability Through Digital Literacy Training, WC Docket No. 12-23.

Dear Ms. Dortch,

On March 12, 2015, a delegation of public interest advocates met with Federal Communications Commission (“FCC”) officials including Radhika Karmarkar from the Wireline Competition Bureau; Travis Litman, Legal Advisor to Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel; and Daniel Alvarez, Legal Advisor to Chairman Tom Wheeler. The delegation included Vanessa Bennett, YouthBuild Americorps VISTA Coordinator; Jodie Griffin, Senior Staff Attorney at Public Knowledge; Edyael Casaperalta representing the Rural Broadband Policy Group (“RBPG”); Corey Perkins and Tori Bracken from YouthBuild of Southeastern Ohio in McArthur; and Sharell Harmon from YouthBuild North Central in Elkins, West Virginia. The delegates met with FCC officials to discuss the importance of high-speed Internet access in their rural communities and for their career goals, and to encourage the Commission to include broadband service in the Lifeline Program.

YouthBuild USA is a national education and job-training model where low-income young people ages 16 to 24 work full-time for 6 to 24 months toward their General Education Development Certificate (“GED”) or high school diplomas while learning job skills by building affordable housing in their communities. At the program’s completion, participants are placed in college, jobs, or both. YouthBuild USA is comprised of 273 programs including 77 programs within the Rural & Tribal Development Initiative. YouthBuild is a member of the Rural Broadband Policy Group, a national coalition of rural-focused organizations advocating for increasing broadband access in rural communities.

Corey, Tori, and Sharell described the challenges they experience accessing wireless and broadband services in their towns, and discussed why these services matter to their educational and career goals.

Sharell is a recipient of the Lifeline phone program. She uses her Lifeline wireless phone to communicate with her children’s daycare, social workers, and employers. She thanked the FCC for creating a program that helps in her daily life and encouraged the Commission to “clone” the

program for broadband service. Currently, Sharell cannot afford Internet access at home because her financial situation requires her to prioritize rent, utilities, and groceries. She explained that a Lifeline Internet program would allow her to take classes online and pursue her goal of becoming a school principal.

Corey talked about wanting to return to his hometown of Chillicothe, Ohio to help his uncle who suffers from poor health and his family financially. However, there are not many employment opportunities in Chillicothe. He told the FCC officials that even looking for a minimum-wage service job requires Internet service to fill out and submit the application. Corey wants to launch a business, but there is no Internet service where he lives and even if it were available, his family would not be able to afford it. He encouraged the FCC to add broadband service to the Lifeline Program. Corey reminded the officials that there are many areas in the country that still do not have broadband access, and efforts to make broadband affordable must also include deployment of infrastructure.

Tori is a student that does not have Internet access at home. She talked about having to go to her aunt's or a friend's house in order to complete homework. She told the FCC officials that while she is able to do some basic research on her phone, a student needs full access on a computer because phones do not have all the features that a computer offers. Tori has plans to continue her education once she completes the YouthBuild program, but knows her family cannot afford Internet service. She encouraged the FCC to provide Lifeline Internet and to make computers, tablets, lap tops, and other hardware available via the program because the cost of these devices is still out of reach for many low-income families.

Sharell, Corey, and Tori presented a document outlining the YouthBuild Rural Caucus' recommendations for a Lifeline Internet program that supports access to affordable Internet in rural communities. The recommendations include: recipient choice in wireless and wired services, preventing data caps, funding digital literacy, no restrictions on websites, protecting recipient's privacy, funding hardware, collaborating with state and federal agencies, and maintaining the eligibility requirements of the telephone program. The delegates respectfully requested the Commission consider their recommendations. Please see the YouthBuild Rural Caucus Lifeline Recommendations document attached.

Ms. Casaperalta stated that the stories the young delegates shared resonate with youth and communities throughout rural America. She noted that as our nation moves towards implementing digital education tools and relies more on Internet access to participate in society, the challenges rural youth and work-training programs face are of grave importance to the FCC's Lifeline program.

The RBPG is a national coalition of rural broadband advocates with two goals: 1) to articulate broadband policies that create opportunities for rural communities to participate fully in the nation's democracy, economy, culture, and society, and 2) to encourage national collaboration among rural advocates for fast, affordable, and reliable telecommunications services. The RBPG partners with YouthBuild in raising awareness about the challenges youth in rural areas face to access digital tools that allow them to pursue their goals and transform their communities.

Respectfully submitted,



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