



CITY OF TAMPA

Bob Buckhorn Mayor

Tampa City Council

Mike Suarez, District 1, At-Large

August 5, 2015

Chairman Tom Wheeler
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Mr. Chairman,

As you know the Lifeline telephone assistance program is a benefit to many low income Americans. The outreach efforts made by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners, and National Association of State Utility Consumer Advocates to ensure that low-income families and individuals are aware of this program are invaluable.

As a Tampa City Council member, I've learned that Hillsborough County has the second highest rate of subscribers to this service, second only to Miami-Dade. It is extremely important for underprivileged households to have access to telecommunications services that are offered to all citizens, allowing them to be competitive in the job market and work on advancing their education and broadband is one of these services. Although I am in favor of expanding Lifeline to provide broadband, this service should not come at the expense of traditional phone services. Moreover, the monthly benefit amount that is currently being used for voice would not be sufficient to support broadband services or a bundle of both voice and broadband. The level of broadband qualified consumers will not have a material impact on Lifeline adoption by low-income households and will not effectively solve any communications issues. A recent proposal to have the eligibility determinations made by either a government entity separate from the FCC or a third-party private entity under contract with the government gives me pause. Eligible Telecommunications Carriers (ETCs) should use personal identification requirements to prevent fraud and serve the same regulatory purpose, without adding an unnecessary burden on the carrier and possible delays in service for consumers.

Additionally, as a program created and supported by the Federal government it should remain a direct benefit to Lifeline customers and not through vouchers. Vouchers will impede the ability of ETCs to reach qualified low-income individuals and households eligible for Lifeline and be subject to abuse by those who will see it as an opportunity to take advantage of others instead of using it for its unintended purpose.

Sincerely,

Mike Suarez
Tampa City Council
District 1, At - Large