

**Before the
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
Washington, DC 20554**

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In the Matter of)	
)	
)	
Lifeline and Link Up Reform and)	WC Docket No. 11-42
Modernization)	
)	
Telecommunications Carriers Eligible for)	WC Docket No. 09-197
Universal Service Support)	
)	
Connect America Fund)	WC Docket No. 10-90
_____)	

**COMMENTS OF GENERAL COMMUNICATION, INC. ON SECOND FURTHER
NOTICE OF PROPOSED RULEMAKING**

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COMMENTS OF GENERAL COMMUNICATION, INC.

Introduction and Summary

General Communication, Inc. (“GCI”) hereby comments on the Commission’s Second Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking.¹ Lifeline is a demonstrable success in Alaska, with telephone subscribership among households with incomes below \$22,883 (91% of poverty level for an Alaskan family of 3, in 2014 dollars) increasing from 61.5%² in 1984 to 90.9%³ in 2014. Subscribership among households with incomes between \$22,883 and \$45,766 (182% of poverty

¹ See *Lifeline and Link Up Reform and Modernization et al.*, Second Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, Order on Reconsideration, Second Report and Order, and Memorandum Opinion and Order, FCC 15-71, 30 FCC Rcd. 7818 (2015) (“*2015 Lifeline Broadband NPRM*” or “*NPRM*”).

² Industry Analysis Division, Common Carrier Bureau, Federal Communications Commission, Telephone Penetration by Income by State at 10, Table 2 (March 2000) available at https://transition.fcc.gov/Bureaus/Common_Carrier/Reports/FCC-State_Link/IAD/pntris99.pdf.

³ Federal and State Staff for the Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service, Federal Communications Commission, Universal Service Monitoring Report at 50, Table 6.8 (2014) available at https://apps.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-330829A1.pdf.

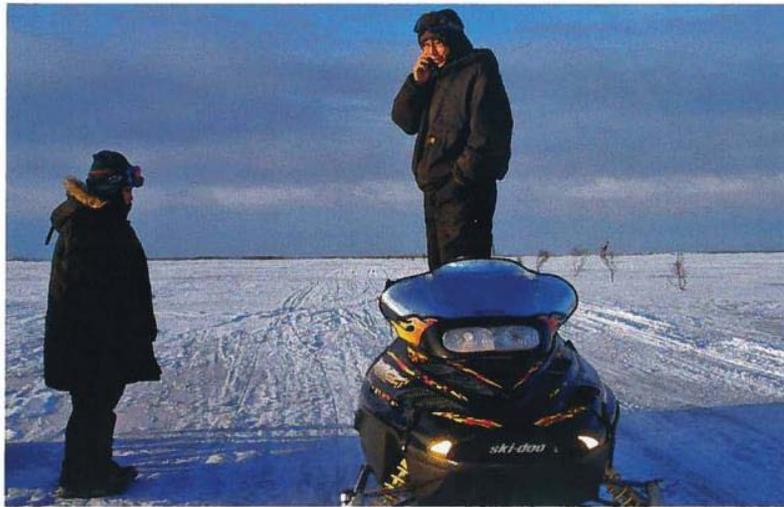
for a family of 3) rose from 80.2% to 98.0% over the same period.⁴ Indeed, since 1999, the last year prior to the creation of Tribal Lands enhanced support, subscribership among the poorest households (those under \$22,883) rose from 86.8% to 90.9%, while households with incomes between \$22,883 and \$45,766 rose from 88.2% to 98.0% subscribership – measurable success for the Commission’s Tribal Lands initiative.⁵

Wireless Lifeline service has played a particularly important role in Alaska and has significantly impacted the lives of low-income and rural Alaskans. That role is highlighted by a story shared in 2010 by a GCI Field Maintenance Group technician that speaks to the vital role that Competitive Eligible Telecommunications Carriers (“CETCs”) play in delivering life-saving telecommunications services:

I thought you would enjoy the picture attached, taken yesterday, December 1, as I made a 60-mile swing on the snowmachine trail checking out RW (rural wireless) equipment issues in “The Tundra Villages,” i.e., Atmautluak, Nunapitchuk and Kasigluk. About five miles out of Atmautluak heading back to Bethel I stopped when I came across these young GCI customers who had a broken chain drive in the middle of a frozen lake. In the old days this would have been a real emergency, but the young man told me, “No problem.” He had just used his GCI cell phone to call his dad to come give them a tow back to their house. When I snapped the picture he was on the line with his parts supplier, ordering a new drive chain so he could pick up parts in Kasigluk and hopefully fix the machine same day. The terrain in the middle of the frozen lake was flat enough that standing on the seat gave him the height he needed to complete a call. (The bushes in the picture are actually trail markers planted by Atmautluak Search and Rescue). These young people acted like it was no big deal at all. It seems that all of us in the GCI Rural Wireless projects have ushered in a paradigm shift for Bush Alaska. I stayed until their tow arrived; their dad was also a GCI Rural Wireless believer, of course.

⁴ See *supra* tables cited in n. 2 and n. 3.

⁵ *Id.*



Photograph by Don Picazo.

Today, the current Lifeline structure provides an enhanced tribal subsidy for Lifeline subscribers in each of the twelve Alaska Native regions established under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. This uniform application of the tribal lands subsidy across the state allows GCI to offer a Lifeline service that is tailored to the needs of low-income Alaskans, many of whom travel throughout the state to pursue seasonal employment or who must remain connected to family or economic opportunities between extremely rural villages and Anchorage. GCI's basic Lifeline service includes unlimited nationwide text, unlimited statewide voice calls between communities served by GCI (which includes 208 Alaska Native communities), 300 MB of mobile data, and 300 MB of data through GCI's hotspot service. This plan works and is administrable today precisely because it is a uniform statewide plan that GCI can feasibly provision throughout the state.

The Commission should not change the level of per line support (including basic and tribal lands supplement) for Lifeline service on tribal lands. For Alaska, recurring support is particularly important to facilitating demand in sparsely populated, remote communities.

The Commission should not carve out Anchorage – Alaska’s “Biggest Native Village” – from the tribal lands definition. Many low-income Alaskans keep their “permanent” residence in Anchorage, but must travel to other parts of the state to pursue seasonal employment opportunities, and must stay connected to their families and potential employers beyond Anchorage. Moreover, given Anchorage’s inextricable economic, social, and familial relationships with the rest of the state, and the mobile nature of the service, it would be extremely difficult to police and administer Lifeline offerings that treated Anchorage differently than the rest of the state.

As the Commission considers whether to mandate – rather than merely to permit – the inclusion of broadband within basic Lifeline service offerings, it should take care to avoid undesirable consequences. For example, the costs of providing Internet access in Alaska vary dramatically depending upon whether a community connects to the Internet by fiber, microwave, or satellite. Microwave and satellite are typically more costly and subject to greater capacity constraints. A large mandatory data allowance may force substantial increases in the price of Lifeline services, hurting affordability, and may actually make it economically infeasible in some areas. This would increase the cost and decrease the availability of Lifeline-supported voice service for those low-income consumers that simply want voice, or voice with lower levels of data.

To avoid these undesirable impacts in a state having both costs and service capabilities as diverse as Alaska, the Commission should make consumer choice and technical constraints bedrock principles for further expanding Lifeline to broadband. Consumers should not be required to purchase broadband that they do not want and that may exceed what can be practically delivered. Similarly, the Commission should recognize – as it has with high cost

support – that backhaul technology affects the feasible level of affordable broadband services. To address the “homework gap,” the Commission should make an exception to the one-per-household rule to allow eligible families with children to get Lifeline support for broadband at home.

With respect to its other proposals, the Commission should give states the option to conduct their own eligibility verification. It should also simplify the rule on offering service, adopt the proposal to count texting as usage, extend the time period for subscriber de-enrollment, simplify standardized forms, and reduce Lifeline-specific administrative burdens, each as described more fully below.

I. ALASKA’S SEASONAL EMPLOYMENT, PERMANENT INTRASTATE RELOCATIONS AND DEMOGRAPHICS TIE THE STATE TOGETHER AS A SINGLE COMMUNITY, WHICH GCI ADDRESSES WITH ITS STATEWIDE LIFELINE SERVICE.

GCI provides Lifeline service in 208 communities across Alaska, including not just Alaska’s more urban communities, such as Anchorage, but also remote villages such as Kaktovik (population 239), Atkasuk (population 233), and Anaktuvuk Pass (population 324).⁶ Many of these 208 communities lack much of the infrastructure that the rest of the United States takes for granted. Most of these communities are accessible only by air, boat, snow machine, or sled, and are unconnected by road, either to Anchorage or the next closest village. They must generate electricity locally – frequently using diesel or developing wind or hydroelectric energy because there is no intertied power grid. In some areas, the primary economy remains subsistence. Some of these 208 communities are located on islands far out in the northern Pacific; some are north of

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census Demographic Profile Summary File: 2010 Census of Population and Housing (2011) available at <https://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/doc/dpsf.pdf>.

the Arctic Circle, located along Alaska's coasts or its major rivers. Alaska's population is widely dispersed throughout its enormous land mass. Indeed, in Alaska, there is approximately one person per square mile,⁷ while in the rest of the United States, there are approximately 87 persons per square mile.⁸ Alaska's geographic and demographic diversity defines the substantial challenges of providing affordable telecommunications services statewide.⁹

Alaska's population is also highly migratory. Much of the migration within Alaska reflects seasonal employment. Indeed, the state's "economy is more seasonal than any other state, with 15 percent more jobs during the peak summer months than during January, the low point of the year in terms of job counts. At the industry level, the seasonality can be noticeably more pronounced."¹⁰ Alaskan commercial fishing, for instance, which produces 25% of the

⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, State & County Quick Facts: Alaska available at <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/02000.html>.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ See Reply Comments of the Alaska Rural Coalition at 9, WC Docket Nos. 10-90 & 05-337 (filed July 23, 2012) ("[T]he lack of roads, extreme climate and harsh geography of Alaska must remain in the forefront of the discussion when considering the role the Remote Areas Fund will play in Alaska."); Comments of Alaska Communications Systems, Inc., WC Docket Nos. 10-90, 09-51, 07-135, 05-337 & 03-109 and CC Docket Nos. 01-92 & 96-45 (filed Jan. 18, 2012) ("Almost everything about providing communications services in Alaska is unique and sets its service providers apart from what other carriers across the country experience."); Comments of General Communication, Inc., WC Docket Nos. 10-90, 09-51, 07-135, 05-337 & 03-109 and CC Docket Nos. 01-92 & 96-45 (filed Jan. 18, 2012) ("Alaska is a uniquely high cost area within which to provide any telecommunications, whether traditional telephony, mobile or broadband. Much of remote Alaska lacks even the basic infrastructure critical to most telecommunications deployment, such as a road system and an intertied power grid.").

¹⁰ Alaska Dept. of Labor and Workforce Development, Alaska Economic Trends May 2015 at 11 (2015) available at http://labor.alaska.gov/bp/forms/Alaska_Integrated_Workforce_Development_Plan.pdf.

United States' total commercial fish output,¹¹ focuses on different catches in different parts of the state at different times of the year.¹² A worker might migrate well over 1000 miles between fisheries. Even transferring jobs within the same company can involve extraordinary distances. One fish company warns potential employees that “traveling from our plant in Sitka to our plant in Togiak is the same distance as traveling from the east coast to the west coast in the continental United States.”¹³ Fishing and hunting guides travel with the seasons and workers travel to and from the oil fields. Other highly seasonal employment in Alaska can be found in the construction, seafood processing, logging, mining, and tourism industries.¹⁴ In some areas, “[s]easonal populations may be higher than the annual average permanent resident population.”¹⁵ As such, a low-income consumer, whether or not they maintain their permanent address in Anchorage, has substantial need for access to a statewide telecommunications network, with affordable statewide service.

¹¹ Alaska Dept. of Labor and Workforce Development, Alaska Integrated Workforce Development Plan PY 2012-2016 at 4 (Sept. 15, 2012) available at <http://www.alaskafishingjobsnetwork.com/overview/>.

¹² See Alaska Fishing Jobs Network, Alaska Fisheries Calendar and Seasons, <http://www.alaskafishingjobsnetwork.com/getting-a-job/alaska-fisheries-calendar-and-seasons/> for a summary description of the five basic Alaskan fishing geographies and their calendars.

¹³ See North Pacific Seafoods, Working for NPS, <http://northpacificseafoods.com/content/view/47/361/>.

¹⁴ Alaska Population Overview, 2005-2006 Estimates, Chapter 1, Alaska State Population at 11 (2006) available at <http://labor.alaska.gov/research/pop/estimates/pub/06chap1.pdf> (“Workers at remote sites, such as the North Slope and fish processing or lumber camps, are allowed to list their place of residence as someplace other than the work site.”).

¹⁵ Alaska Dept. of Labor and Workforce Development, Alaska Population Projections 2010 to 2034 at 6 (Feb. 2011) (“Migration is the most uncertain component of population change for Alaska.”).

To add another layer to the already complex regulatory backdrop that is Alaska, the state also has a disproportionately high number of intrastate migrants.¹⁶ Because long-term, non-seasonal migration lacks the flexibility of eventually returning to the origin of a particular consumer's Lifeline service, it provides an additional incentive to ensure that low-income Alaska consumers have statewide access to service. Indeed, often these consumers are moving away from relatively large cities like Anchorage and to small, remote villages¹⁷ where they will have little to no options for initiating a new, village-specific service. As previously stated, low-income consumers in Anchorage have considerable need for access to a statewide telecommunications network. Indeed, data has shown that permanent relocators, especially those that relocate often, tend to be lower income.¹⁸

¹⁶ E. Hunsinger and D. Howell, *Alaska's Highly Migratory Population* at 1, Alaska Economic Trends (Apr. 2012) available at <http://laborstats.alaska.gov/trends/Apr12art1.pdf> ("Alaska has one of the highest rates of population turnover in the nation – there are always large numbers of people moving in and out, regardless of whether the overall population is growing or shrinking.") (*Alaska's Highly Migratory Population*).

¹⁷ Those who tend to migrate within Alaska's borders are more likely to find jobs than those who do not migrate. This provides an incentive for movement and thereby drives up the necessity of a statewide voice network. *See, e.g.*, D. Howell, Rural and Urban Migration – Where People Move and How It Affects Their Employment at 11, Alaska Economic Trends (May 2015) available at <http://labor.state.ak.us/trends/may15.pdf> ("Among those who weren't working in the initial year of each period, 35 percent who migrated were employed in the final year; for those who stayed put, it was 19 percent."); *see also Alaska's Highly Migratory Population*.

¹⁸ F. Murkowski, Alaska Dept. of Labor and Workplace Development, Employment Forecast 2005-2006 at 25, Alaska Economic Trends (May 2005) available at <http://labor.state.ak.us/trends/may05.pdf> ("The income patterns also show that individuals who move between urban areas have lower incomes, on average, than those who don't, and those who move each year often have lower incomes than those who moved only once.").

With respect to Alaska Natives, at 14.3 percent, Alaska has the highest percentage of native population of any state.¹⁹ Under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, federal law divided the entire state into twelve regions, with a native-owned corporation responsible for each, as part of the settlement of Alaska Natives' historical land claims. This treatment deliberately differed from the development of reservations and the concept of "Indian Country" in the lower 48. This is reflected in the Bureau of Indian Affairs' definition of "reservation," which includes not only traditional "reservations," but also "Alaska Native regions established pursuant to the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act"²⁰ The Commission expressly adopted this BIA language to define "tribal lands" for the Lifeline Program.²¹ Anchorage, as the state's "largest village," is a core part of the statewide Alaska Native community and economy. Indeed, Anchorage has the highest percentage of Alaska Native/Native American population of any community in the United States with a population over 100,000.²²

With the entire state falling within the definition of "tribal lands" under existing rules, GCI has been able to offer a robust, statewide Lifeline service that meets the needs of Alaska's low-income population, whether they reside in remote villages and have to travel to Anchorage,

¹⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month (Nov. 2014) available at http://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/newsroom/facts-for-features/2014/cb14ff-26_aian_heritage_month.pdf.

²⁰ 20 C.F.R. § 20.1(v).

²¹ *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, Twelfth Report and Order, Memorandum Opinion and Order of Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, FCC 00-208, 15 FCC Rcd. 12,208, 12,217-18 ¶ 16-17 (2000) (citing 25 C.F.R. § 20.1(p) and 25 C.F.R. § 20.1(v)) ("FCC 00-208").

²² U.S. Census Bureau, *The American Indian and Alaska Native Population: 2010* at 12, Table 4 (January 2012) available at <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-10.pdf> (Current estimate is 12.4 percent Alaska Native/Native American alone or in combination, which is available at <http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF>).

or may reside in Anchorage and have to travel to remote villages. Specifically, GCI offers a postpaid Lifeline service with unlimited nationwide texting, unlimited calling between and among the communities served by GCI's wireless network in Alaska, 300 MB of mobile data and 300 MB of data use through GCI's Wi-Fi hot spots (called "Turbo Zone").²³ (GCI does not offer a prepaid Lifeline service.) This offering allows low-income Alaskans, no matter where they live, to be able to keep in touch with family and pursue economic opportunities almost anywhere they might be located in the state, through voice, text or email. Lifeline users also have sufficient data allowances to be able to interact with the government with respect to benefits, and with prospective employers. In particular, a subscriber that lives in Anchorage is not limited to Anchorage, and subscribers from remote villages maintain affordable mobile Lifeline service when they must travel to Anchorage for business, health care, education, or to visit family.

II. THE COMMISSION SHOULD NOT EXCLUDE ANCHORAGE FROM TRIBAL LANDS OR ALTER PER LINE LIFELINE SUPPORT LEVELS STATEWIDE.

The FNPRM seeks comment on whether tribal land support should be reduced, or whether communities above a certain size, such as census-defined urban areas of more than 100,000 in population, should be excluded from the areas eligible for "tribal lands" enhanced support.²⁴ With respect to Alaska, either step would undermine progress in promoting connectivity among low-income Alaskans, and particularly Alaska Natives. Moreover, such steps would make it extremely difficult for GCI to maintain its current robust Lifeline service

²³ Subject to a credit check, GCI also allows its Lifeline subscribers to purchase roaming or additional data capacity.

²⁴ See *NPRM* ¶ 169 ("We also seek comment on whether we should focus enhanced Tribal support to those Tribal areas with lower population densities, on the theory that provision of enhanced support in more densely populated areas is inconsistent with the Commission's objectives.").

offerings that include unlimited calling to the vast majority of the state, and a basic level of mobile broadband and hotspot data capacity.

A. Alaska Natives Are Economically and Socially Disadvantaged Compared with the Population as a Whole.

The most recent census data shows that, as of 2010, Alaska Natives remain substantially disadvantaged across a wide range of social and economic indicators, as compared with the country as a whole.

Table 1²⁵

	Alaska Natives	All Americans
Percent of people below poverty line	20.2%	13.8%
Percent of people with incomes below 200% of poverty level	46.0%	32.0%
Households without complete plumbing	14.7%	0.5%
Unemployment rate	21.8%	7.9%
Drop-out rate, grades 9-12 (2009-2010 school year)	11.6%	3.4%
Percent of people 25 and older with 4-year college degrees	7.0%	27.9%
Median household income	\$42,884	\$51,914

These indicators show that, to the extent that enhanced Lifeline support for Tribal Lands was meant to preserve affordability of basic communications against a backdrop of lower income and

²⁵ See 2006-2010 American Community Survey Selected Population Tables, http://www2.census.gov/acs2010_SPT_AIAN/SelectedPopulationTables/ACS_SPT_SF_Tech_Doc.pdf; 2006-2010 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, <http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk>; NCES Common Core of Data State Dropout and Completion Data File 2009-2010, <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/drpcompstatelvl.asp> (Note: Alaska Natives includes Alaska Native alone or in any combination.).

economic opportunities, those remain compelling reasons for enhanced Lifeline support.²⁶ FCC telephone subscribership data also suggest that Alaska Natives would be expected to have disproportionately low telephone subscribership, correlated with disproportionately low incomes. According to the FCC's 2014 Monitoring Report, telephone subscribership in Alaska for households with annual income exceeding \$45,766 (less than twice the Alaska poverty level for a family of 3)²⁷ exceeds 99%.²⁸ But the lowest income group for which the FCC publishes data, which has annual household income at about 90% of the federal poverty guidelines for an Alaskan family of 3, has telephone subscribership of only 91%.²⁹ This is below the national average for this same household income group (93%), as well as below the national average for households as a whole (96.3%).³⁰ If the price of Lifeline offerings increased, that subscribership would surely drop.

B. Anchorage Is a Significant Part of the Native Alaskan Community, and Is Also an Integral Part of Alaska's Statewide Economic and Social Fabric.

Anchorage is culturally distinct from cities of similar population elsewhere in the United States, and intertwined both economically and culturally with the rest of Alaska's vast expanse. It continues to have a sizeable and well-established native population, contributing to its moniker as "Alaska's Biggest Native Village."³¹ The municipal government advises Native Alaskans

²⁶ See FCC 00-208 ¶ 20.

²⁷ See Annual Update of the HHS Poverty Guidelines, 80 Fed. Reg. 3236, 3237 (Jan. 22, 2015) (Federal Poverty Guidelines set \$25,120 as the poverty level for a family of 3 in Alaska.).

²⁸ See FCC 2014 Universal Service Monitoring Report at 52, Table 6.8.

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ *Id.*

³¹ Mike Dunham, Anchorage is Alaska's biggest Native 'village,' census shows, Alaska Dispatch News (July 10, 2011) <http://www.adn.com/article/20110710/anchorage-alaskas-biggest-native-village-census-shows>.

moving to Anchorage that “Anchorage is home to many Alaska Natives and residents that rely on hunting, fishing and trapping to provide food and clothing to their families. Alaska Natives are also able to continue their subsistence way of life in Anchorage; further, they are able to make saleable arts and crafts from animal products to enable income to their home.”³²

C. Anchorage Is Significantly Less Dense Than Other Urban Areas Over 100,000 in Population.

If the FCC nevertheless limits Tribal Lifeline to lower-density areas, it should not use mere population of an area as a proxy for density.³³ The Proposed Rulemaking compared Anchorage to Tulsa, OK, Chandler, AZ, and Reno, NV. At first blush, their populations explain the comparison; all appear to be small to mid-sized American cities, with populations of 250,000 to 400,000. But look closer at the data. The population densities of Reno and Tulsa are 14 and 13 times that of Anchorage, respectively. The population density of Chandler is more than 28 times higher than Anchorage. The Municipality of Anchorage has about the same population density as rural Leavenworth County, Kansas.³⁴

³² Dept. of Health and Human Services, Municipality of Anchorage, Alaska Native Relocation Guide at 6 (Sept. 20, 2014) available at <http://www.muni.org/Departments/health/DirectServices/Documents/Emergency%20Outreach%20Services/AK%20Native%20Relocation%20Guide%20Sep%202014.pdf>.

³³ See *NPRM* ¶ 170 (noting that “the United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) excludes from eligibility residents of towns or cities in Oklahoma greater than 10,000. The Commission seeks comment on whether we should implement a similar approach that excludes urban areas on Tribal lands from receiving enhanced Tribal support.”).

³⁴ Institute for Policy & Social Research, University of Kansas, Kansas Statistical Abstract available at <http://www.ipsr.ku.edu/ksdata/ksah/population/>.

Table 2

City	Area in Square Miles ³⁵	Est. 2014 Population ³⁶	Density
Chandler, AZ	58.0	254,276	4,384/sq. mi
Tulsa, OK	197.0	399,682	2,029/sq. mi
Reno, NV	105.9	233,294	2,203/sq. mi
Anchorage, AK	1,968.6	300,950	153/sq. mi

Anchorage contains only 153 persons per square mile, by far the lowest population density of the nation’s 275 cities with 100,000 or more residents.³⁷ By comparison, the next densest city, Norman, OK (620 persons per square mile) is three times more dense than Anchorage. Frisco, Texas (1,893 persons per square mile) is 10 times more dense and San Francisco (17,404 persons per square mile) is 100 times more dense than Anchorage. With the comparatively sparse customer base and low overall population, it is more difficult and costly for carriers even in Anchorage to provide service across the large distances separating “urban” Anchorage from other communities.

And, this relatively sparse population must bear higher absolute infrastructure costs than similarly sized populations in the lower 48. For instance, there is no Tier 1 Internet point of presence in the entire state. To reach one, undersea cables stretch from Anchorage to Seattle,

³⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, State & County QuickFacts available at <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/index.html>.

³⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates available at <http://www.census.gov/popest/data/cities/totals/2014/SUB-EST2014-3.html>.

³⁷ Population density statistics are as counted in the 2010 U.S. Census. See U.S. Census Bureau, *2014 U.S. Gazetteer Files* available at <https://www.census.gov/geo/maps-data/data/gazetteer2014.html> with further information available through the American FactFinder website at <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml>.

Washington, and Portland, Oregon – 1435 and 1541 miles away, respectively. Such are the enormous infrastructure costs concentrated on the relatively small population base in Alaska, where hundreds of thousands of users – not millions – are served.

The Commission should recognize the high costs of serving throughout Alaska, including the more populated areas of Alaska, and at the bare minimum, refrain from setting a different minimum support level for tribal lands.

D. It Would Be Infeasible to Implement and Police Different Support Levels Between Anchorage and the Rest of Alaska, and Would Disrupt GCI's State Lifeline Voice and Data Service.

GCI's statewide Lifeline voice service has significant advantages that would be lost if GCI were to segregate its Lifeline service between Anchorage and the rest of the state. By having an unlimited statewide offering, neither Lifeline consumers nor GCI have to worry about Lifeline customers exhausting their basic usage buckets and then having to allocate payments between basic service and overage charges. If Anchorage only received the basic support, while the rest of the state received enhanced Tribal support in addition, GCI would either have to charge all Anchorage Lifeline customers the amount of the Tribal support, or would have to develop a stripped down, Anchorage-only Lifeline service with much more limited offerings.

Furthermore, in a state with high levels of seasonal movement for employment, GCI would have to try to police the distinction between eligibility for Rest-of-Alaska rates versus Anchorage rates – which is likely impossible to do. It would be extremely difficult to refuse to sell a Rest-of-Alaska plan to a worker purchasing service in a regional center or village with a local address, even if that worker spends the majority of the year residing in Anchorage. Similarly, if the Municipality of Anchorage is carved out, residents of the nearby portions of the Matanuska Valley would be eligible for Rest-of-Alaska pricing, while Anchorage residents just a few miles away would not.

The Commission asks about providing enhanced benefits in areas with enhanced Tribal support. GCI is doing that, providing a robust service that meets the needs of low-income Alaskans and that far exceeds what is commonly available in the lower 48. The Commission should not make it administratively impossible to continue such offerings by carving Anchorage out of Tribal Lands.

E. Given the High Costs of Developing and Supporting Statewide Service, the Commission Should Not Reduce the Total Per Line Lifeline Support for Alaska.

As we have described, a statewide, rather than local, mobile voice and data service best meets the needs of low-income Alaskans, including those that reside in Anchorage. However, to develop a statewide network is extremely costly, particularly one that provides Lifeline service in 208 communities – a number which will continue to grow provided that the Commission also adopts the stable, forward-looking support proposed in the Alaska Telephone Association’s Alaska Plan. While GCI is not advocating double-counting, Lifeline also helps to support statewide voice and data service by increasing subscribership in rural communities.

Increased subscribership counsels in favor of maintaining existing levels of total support for lines within Alaska. Maintaining per-line support levels will allow Alaska to sustain improvements in low-income subscribership that began when Alaska started participating in Lifeline in 1994, and the further progress made since the introduction of Tribal Lands support in 2000.

III. THE COMMISSION SHOULD PRESERVE LIFELINE CONSUMER CHOICE AND RECOGNIZE DIFFERING INFRASTRUCTURE CAPABILITIES WITH RESPECT TO ANY INCLUSION OF BROADBAND.

A. The Commission Should Structure Any Inclusion of Broadband as a Supported Lifeline Service to Respect Consumer Choice.

Current rules allow carriers to permit subscribers to apply Lifeline support to bundled service packages, as well as to specific Lifeline offerings.³⁸ The Commission should expand this to allow consumers to use Lifeline support to purchase data-only service, if that is what they deem to be the most important use of their one support per household.³⁹ However, the Commission should not mandate the inclusion of broadband capability in a manner that would require Lifeline consumers to purchase services that they do not desire.

³⁸ 47 C.F.R. § 54.401(b).

³⁹ See *NPRM* ¶ 34 (“We propose to establish minimum service levels for fixed and mobile voice and broadband service that Lifeline providers must offer to all Lifeline customers in order to be eligible to receive Lifeline reimbursement.”); *id.* ¶ 37 (“[W]e propose to require providers to offer data-only broadband to Lifeline customers to ensure affordability of the service.”); *id.* ¶ 38 (“Some consumers may prefer to use their Lifeline discount for a voice-only service, and we seek comment on how to require providers to continue offering affordable stand-alone voice service to provide consumers’ access to critical employment, health care, public safety, or educational opportunities.”).

Poll data suggests that a surprising portion of consumers are not interested in internet access:

The main reasons non-internet users do not use the internet

In May 2010, 21% of American adults age 18+ did not use the internet. (This number is 22% as of August 2011.) When asked the main reason they do not go online (in their own words), these are the factors they cite.

	% of offline adults
What is the MAIN reason you don't use the internet or email?	
Just not interested	31%
Don't have a computer	12
Too expensive	10
Too difficult	9
It's a waste of time	7
Don't have access	6
Don't have time to learn	6
Too old to learn	4
Don't want/need it	4
Just don't know how	2
Physically unable	2
Worried about viruses/spyware/spam	1
Other	6

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, April 29-May 30, 2010 Tracking Survey. N=2,252 adults 18 and older (n=496 for non-internet users).

More: <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Home-Broadband-2010.aspx>

These consumers, who have no desire for broadband service at a certain level or at all, should not be made to spend already limited funds on broadband service in order to retain Lifeline voice service – which could especially be the case if mandated broadband then required a carrier to increase the end user payment required for Lifeline service.

B. The Commission Must Take Different Infrastructure Capabilities Into Account in Establishing Any Minimum Service Requirements for Broadband.

If the Commission is going to mandate some level of broadband that must be offered to Lifeline consumers, it must also take into account the limitations of existing networks in certain low-population, geographically challenged locations like Alaska, including with respect to backhaul. The Commission has already done this in part with respect to high cost support, where it set much lower broadband requirements for areas with satellite backhaul than with terrestrial backhaul.⁴⁰ Similarly, microwave terrestrial backhaul, which is a significant improvement over satellite, an increasingly important mode of transport throughout western Alaska in particular, does not have the same level of capacity or per MB cost characteristics as fiber-based backhaul. It would not be possible to offer fixed or mobile Lifeline service with included data at the levels of lower 48 services in much of Alaska and maintain affordable rates, even with the enhanced tribal support and existing basic discounts.

Moreover, the Commission should recognize that where middle mile capacity is costly as compared with fiber, mandating large broadband data allowances simply pushes up the price that a Lifeline provider will have to charge for Lifeline service – and areas of high Lifeline eligibility may in fact impose excessive network loads. As price increases, fewer low-income consumers will be able to afford the package, which itself is counter-productive with respect to Lifeline’s stated purpose to promote the availability of affordable voice and broadband services for low-

⁴⁰ See *Connect America Fund*, Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, FCC 11-161, 26 FCC Rcd. 17,663, 17,699-700 ¶ 101 (2011) (relaxing the broadband public interest obligation for carriers providing fixed broadband, that are compelled to use satellite backhaul facilities to 1 Mbps/256 kbps); see also 47 C.F.R. § 54.313(g).

income Americans and hurts the business case for providers attempting to expand service to sparse populations with thin cash economies.

IV. THE COMMISSION SHOULD PERMIT STATES TO DEVELOP THEIR OWN THIRD-PARTY ELIGIBILITY DETERMINATION MECHANISMS.

The Commission should allow states to opt out of any national third-party eligibility determination system that it might establish.⁴¹ Because states have unique programs, *e.g.*, Denali Kid Care,⁴² allowing them to opt out and make their own third-party eligibility determination will keep verification closer to state-specific variations in program proof. Another reason for state-specific eligibility determination is that states have unique circumstances that a national verifier may not be able to address. For instance, address verification in Alaska will be very different than New York – postal address norming is less effective in parts of Alaska. A state-level option will give states like Alaska the flexibility to deal with unique address issues.

Similarly, the Commission should not reduce the number of qualifying programs without considering state-specific circumstances.⁴³ States should remain free to experiment and meet local needs by adding their own qualifying programs. Restraining states from doing so will certainly cause many low-income consumers who rely on such programs to be locked out of the Lifeline program. Some low-income consumers do not participate in all the programs for which they are eligible, for reasons that remain unknown. These consumers should not be punished by

⁴¹ See *NPRM* ¶ 76 (“We seek comment on requirements for state eligibility databases generally in order for a state to qualify to opt out of a national verifier.”); *id.* ¶¶ 63-120.

⁴² Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Health Care Services, Denali KidCare – Alaska’s Children’s Health Insurance Program – (CHIP) available at <http://dhss.alaska.gov/dhcs/Pages/denalikidcare/default.aspx>.

⁴³ See *NPRM* ¶ 113 (“We specifically seek comment on any potential drawbacks in limiting the qualification criteria for Lifeline support exclusively to households receiving benefits under a specific federal assistance program(s).”).

a decision by the Commission to withdraw income-based eligibility.⁴⁴ Rather, state-based eligibility variations should continue given the diversity of state practices on social welfare programs.

V. TO CLOSE THE “HOMEWORK DIVIDE,” THE COMMISSION SHOULD MAKE A LIMITED EXCEPTION TO THE ONE-PER-HOUSEHOLD RULE TO ALLOW ELIGIBLE FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN TO RECEIVE ONE ADDITIONAL LIFELINE DISCOUNT FOR BROADBAND AT HOME.

More and more, children need broadband at home to do homework. But household broadband subscribership continues to lag in homes of families with lower income and lower educational attainment.⁴⁵ The NPRM appropriately seeks comment on how Lifeline can help address the “homework gap.”⁴⁶

GCI proposes that the Commission allow a second support payment for broadband service – not a second voice line – for eligible households with a child aged 5 through 18 (kindergarten through grade 12). Limiting this exception to households with children, and to broadband data, not voice service, is consistent with the Commission’s 2012 decision, which

⁴⁴ See *NPRM* ¶ 114 (“We also seek comment on whether we should continue to allow low-income consumers to qualify for Lifeline support based on household income and/or eligibility criteria established by a state.”).

⁴⁵ See Office of Science and Technology Policy and The National Economic Council *Four Years of Broadband Growth* at 8 (June 2013) available online at https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/broadband_report_final.pdf (“Demographic factors influence broadband adoption. For example, home broadband adoption among those with at least a college degree (88%) is more than double that of those who did not complete high school (35%); 50 percentage points separate broadband use of households with annual incomes exceeding \$100,000 from those with incomes below \$25,000 (93% compared to 43%).”).

⁴⁶ See *NPRM* ¶ 22 (“Lifeline can help to extend broadband access beyond the school walls and the school day to ensure that low-income students do not become digitally disconnected once they leave the school building. Lifeline can help to ensure that low-income students have access to the resources needed to complete their research and homework assignments, and compete in the digital age.”).

recognized the need to balance access to supported telephony, especially for public safety, with the need to minimize the burden on the Universal Service Fund.⁴⁷

This proposal straightforwardly addresses a side-effect of the one-per-household rule. Lifeline originated in the landline era. Traditionally, when a person left the home, the connection stayed attached to the kitchen wall. But mobile phones, which Americans increasingly prefer, are mobile. The one-per-household rule was intended to contain growing Lifeline support, to focus on household access rather than personal access. But a mobile broadband connection is of no use to a student at home when the member of a household with the Lifeline handset goes to work, school, grocery store, *etc.*⁴⁸ Providing a broadband connection at home for school-age children does not implicate the same concerns that led to the one-per-household policy, and thus should be supported through a limited exception for a data-only connection.

⁴⁷ See *Lifeline and Link Up Reform and Modernization; Lifeline and Link Up; Fed.-State Joint Bd. on Universal Serv.; Advancing Broadband Availability Through Digital Literacy Training*, Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 27 FCC Rcd. 6656, 6694 ¶ 82-83 (2012) (“We recognize the public safety concerns raised by some commenters with respect to a one-per-household rule. However, as noted above, the potential benefits of a one-per-person rule must be balanced against the corresponding increase in the burden on the consumers and businesses that contribute to USF.”) (“2012 Lifeline Reform Order”).

⁴⁸ See *id.* at 6693 n.291 (explaining that “[c]ommenters state, for example, that one member of a household could take a mobile phone with them outside of their residence, leaving the rest of the household members without a phone”).

VI. THE COMMISSION SHOULD TAKE OTHER MEASURES TO STREAMLINE LIFELINE COMPLEXITY, BUT SHOULD AVOID COUNTERPRODUCTIVE MEASURES.

A. Subscriber-Originated Texts Should Count as Usage.

Subscriber texting should count as usage for purposes of the usage requirement for prepaid Lifeline.⁴⁹ As device usage patterns shift, texting is an increasingly important way to use mobile devices in particular. This increase clearly shows that subscribers use and value, and increasingly prefer, their text service. There is no reason to think they value a Lifeline-supported texting service less than voice, and the Commission’s proposal to count texting as usage is a well-supported recognition of that development.

In addition, many carrier systems currently monitor usage of any kind for business reasons. The current exclusion of texting presents administrative and recordkeeping burdens, as carriers have to take additional steps to distinguish recent text usage from other recent usage solely to satisfy this rule. The proposed reform would slightly alleviate Lifeline’s extraordinary administrative burden on carriers.

B. The Commission Should Create Standardized Forms, but Must Correct Errors on USAC’s Model Forms.

The Commission should create “an official, standardized initial certification form [and a] recertification form”⁵⁰ The Commission’s concerns about whether consumers can

⁴⁹ See *NPRM* ¶ 146 (“[I]n light of the changes in consumer behavior highlighted by the extensive use of text messaging, we propose to amend section 54.407(c)(2) of our rules to allow the sending of a text message by a subscriber to constitute usage.”); see also 47 C.F.R. 54.407(c)(2) (“[A]n eligible telecommunications carrier shall only continue to receive universal service support reimbursement for such Lifeline service provided to subscribers who have used the service within the last 60 days.”).

⁵⁰ See *NPRM* ¶ 205 (“To increase compliance with the rules, facilitate administration of the program and to reduce burdens placed upon ETCs, the Commission proposes creating an

understand such forms are well placed.⁵¹ Currently, the breadth and complexity of the required disclosures and questions make any Lifeline form, no matter how well designed, difficult to understand. Reducing rather than increasing the volume of such boilerplate will help make the forms more comprehensible. On the other hand, adding execution date,⁵² an advisory regarding how to terminate,⁵³ and telephone number to call to terminate will make already-difficult forms even harder for subscribers to get through,⁵⁴ as will requiring a prospective subscriber to initial each required disclosure.⁵⁵

With regard to the sample forms that USAC currently uses for recertification and provides to ETCs to use for the household worksheet, these forms are needlessly complex and

official, standardized initial certification form, annual recertification form and ‘one-per household’ worksheet.”).

⁵¹ *See id.* (“In GAO’s most recent report on Lifeline, it notes that many eligible consumers may struggle to complete an application due to lack of literacy or language skills. The Commission thus seeks comment on how to improve the language used on such forms so that consumers are better able to understand their and the ETC’s obligations.”).

⁵² *See NPRM* ¶ 207 (“We propose to require Lifeline providers to record the subscriber execution date on certification and recertification forms.”).

⁵³ *See id.* ¶ 151 (“We seek further comment on requiring Lifeline providers to publicize their 24-hour customer service number in a manner reasonably designed to reach their subscribers and indicate, on all materials describing the service that subscribers may cancel or de-enroll themselves from Lifeline services, for any reason, without having to submit any additional documents.”).

⁵⁴ *See id.* ¶ 150 (“We propose to require Lifeline providers to make readily available a 24 hour customer service number allowing subscribers to de-enroll from Lifeline services, for any reason.”).

⁵⁵ *See id.* ¶ 177 (“[W]e propose that all written certifications (irrespective of whether they are in paper or electronic form) mandate that subscribers initial their acknowledgement of each of the requirements.”).

confusing. Indeed, the “Lifeline Program Certification Form”⁵⁶ requests that certain applicants enter the “State approved assistance program” through which they qualify for Lifeline. This prompt assumes that applicants know which programs are state-approved. The “Lifeline Program Certification Form” and the “Lifeline Program Annual Recertification Form”⁵⁷ ask whether the applicant resides on tribal lands and then offers a highly technical definition of what it means to reside on tribal lands. As noted above, this small blizzard of words offers literally no benefit in Alaska, which consists entirely of tribal lands.⁵⁸ The forms also require that applicants with household size greater than five or six use arithmetic to figure out whether they qualify on the basis of income. The “Lifeline Household Worksheet”⁵⁹ asks the applicant whether their “spouse or domestic partner (that is, someone you are married to or in a relationship with) already receive a Lifeline-discounted phone? (*check no if you do not have a spouse or partner*),” and explains that applicants who check “yes” may not sign up for Lifeline. But this is plainly misleading and contrary to 47 CFR §54.400(h), which contains no rule limiting Lifeline support to one of two people “in a relationship with” one another. Many people who would confirm a relationship with one another do not share a household, and the relevant limitation – unlike the

⁵⁶ Universal Service Administrative Company, Lifeline Program Certification Form available at http://www.usac.org/_res/documents/li/FCCForComment/2015-Lifeline-Program-Certification-Form-Comments.pdf.

⁵⁷ Universal Service Administrative Company, Lifeline Program Annual Recertification Form available at http://www.usac.org/_res/documents/li/FCCForComment/2015-Lifeline-Program-Annual-Recertification-Form-Comments.pdf.

⁵⁸ *See supra*, § I.

⁵⁹ Universal Service Administrative Company, Lifeline Household Worksheet available at http://www.usac.org/_res/documents/li/FCCForComment/Lifeline-household-worksheet-comments.docx.

current USAC form – only applies to an “individual or group of individuals who are living together at the same address as one economic unit.”⁶⁰

In at least one respect, both the USAC sample household form and its online tool can lead consumers to an erroneous conclusion. The form and tool assume that if the potential subscriber shares expenses and income with one person other than a spouse/domestic partner at their residence, all persons are part of a single household, and thus any other Lifeline subscription disqualifies all residents.⁶¹ But that is not necessarily correct. As GCI has pointed out, the person with whom the prospective Lifeline subscriber shares income and household expenses is not necessarily the person who subscribes to Lifeline.⁶² The one-per-household rule disqualifies the prospective Lifeline subscriber only when the person already receiving Lifeline is part of their household, *i.e.*, is the person with whom they share income and household expenses. Any national form would have to correct these errors.

To put it simply, if the Commission is to prescribe a single national form that all carriers and subscribers must use to apply for Lifeline benefits, it must, at a minimum, take care to ensure the form accurately corresponds to the Lifeline regulations. Ideally, it would take steps to

⁶⁰ GCI, like other carriers, has borne the burden of developing its own Lifeline forms to avoid the noncompliance with Lifeline regulations implied by the USAC-prescribed form.

⁶¹ Universal Service Administrative Company, Lifeline Household Worksheet available at http://www.usac.org/_res/documents/li/FCCForComment/Lifeline-household-worksheet-comments.docx; Lifeline Pre-Screening Tool available at <http://www.lifelinesupport.org/ls/eligibility/default.aspx>.

⁶² *See, e.g.*, Letter from John T. Nakahata, Counsel, GCI, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, Federal Communications Commission, WC Docket Nos. 11-42 and 03-109 and CC Docket No. 96-45 (filed June 11, 2012) (explaining that “[t]he Worksheet fails to contemplate the possibility that the prospective subscriber shares income and expenses with one adult at his or her residence, while a third adult, with whom the prospective subscriber does not share income and expenses, is a Lifeline subscriber.”).

simplify the form to make it more rather than less comprehensible to the challenged low-income population forced to penetrate such daunting paperwork in order to apply for Lifeline.

C. The Commission Should Not Require a 24-Hour Customer Service Number for Subscriber De-Enrollment When a Carrier Does Not Provide 24-Hour Customer Service for Non-Lifeline Customers.

Requiring carriers to maintain a 24-hour customer-service number for subscriber de-enrollment⁶³ is unreasonable when a carrier does not maintain a 24-hour number for its non-Lifeline customers. One of the ways carriers compete for any and all customers is in responding to subscribers' customer-service expectations. GCI has not found it necessary to provide 24-hour customer service for enrollment, de-enrollment, and billing for any of its customers, whether Lifeline or non-Lifeline. It should not be required to create a 24-hour number solely to meet Lifeline requirements, especially when the vast majority of GCI's customers are not Lifeline subscribers. GCI has no problem with requiring that Lifeline customers have the same hours of availability for enrollment, de-enrollment, and billing as all other customers.

Additionally, adding the carrier's customer service number and a prescribed text about termination to "all material describing the service"⁶⁴ is unworkable. There are already a host of required disclaimers,⁶⁵ generally seen as "boilerplate" by consumers, contributing to the ungainly

⁶³ See *NPRM* ¶ 151 ("We seek further comment on requiring Lifeline providers to publicize their 24-hour customer service number in a manner reasonably designed to reach their subscribers and indicate, on all materials describing the service that subscribers may cancel or de-enroll themselves from Lifeline services, for any reason, without having to submit any additional documents.").

⁶⁴ See *NPRM* ¶ 151 ("For the purposes of this rule, we propose that the term 'materials describing the service' includes all print, audio, video, and web materials used to describe or enroll in the Lifeline service offering, including application and certification forms and materials sent confirming initiation of the service.").

⁶⁵ *2012 Lifeline Reform Order* ¶ 275 ("[The Commission has adopted]

format of Lifeline application paperwork and contributing to customer confusion. There is no basis in the administrative record to find that adding prescribed termination text will increase voluntary terminations by subscribers, let alone to find that it would do so to a degree that offsets the incremental administrative burden and confusion. As other federal agencies have found, more words can obscure rather than clarify.⁶⁶

Further, recording all customer termination requests⁶⁷ is also unworkable. Even in a one-party consent state such as Alaska, carriers will not know at the outset of a call whether it will be a termination call. As such, to ensure compliance with this new rule, carriers would have to begin recording all calls at the outset. Doing so would magnify an already staggering record-keeping burden for carriers participating in Lifeline.⁶⁸ While carriers could set up a special

rules requiring ETCs to explain in clear, easily understood language in all such marketing materials that the offering is a Lifeline-supported service; that only eligible consumers may enroll in the program; what documentation is necessary for enrollment; and that the program is limited to one benefit per household, consisting of either wireline or wireless service. We also require ETCs to explain that Lifeline is a government benefit program, and consumers who willfully make false statements in order to obtain the benefit can be punished by fine or imprisonment or can be barred from the program.”).

⁶⁶ The Plain Language Action and Information Network, *Federal Plain Language Guidelines* (March 2011) at 38 available at <http://www.plainlanguage.gov/howto/guidelines/FederalPLGuidelines/FederalPLGuidelines.pdf>.

⁶⁷ See *NPRM* ¶ 151 (“We seek comment on a rule requiring Lifeline providers to record such requests for termination and make such records available to state and Federal regulators upon request.”).

⁶⁸ See Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, Federal Communications Commission, *Inventory of Currently Approved Information Collections* (Aug. 26, 2015) available at <http://www.reginfo.gov/public/do/PRAMain> (OMB estimates that all FCC regulation combined imposes approximately 84 million hours of paperwork burden on Americans outside government every year); see also *View ICR – OIRA Conclusion* available at http://www.reginfo.gov/public/do/PRAViewICR?ref_nbr=201504-3060-018 (OMB CONTROL NUMBER: 3060-0819) (The regulatory burden of the Lifeline program alone, estimated at 24 million hours a year, thus accounts for over 28% of the total regulatory burden imposed by the FCC.).

Lifeline-only number and try to record all such calls, that would risk making Lifeline service termination *harder*, not easier. Customers who call a Lifeline carrier's regular customer service number should be able to terminate just like all other customers.

D. The Commission Should Not Make Wireless Emergency Alert Participation Mandatory for Lifeline.

Lifeline providers should not be singled out for the additional burden of making provision of Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA, also known as Commercial Mobile Alert Service, or CMAS) mandatory for their Lifeline service.⁶⁹ As authorized and enacted by Congress, CMAS is a voluntary undertaking by carriers, with carriers that did not elect to implement CMAS subject to certain mandatory disclosure requirements at the point-of-sale and to existing customers at the time the provider elected not to implement CMAS.⁷⁰ As proposed in the FNPRM a Lifeline provider would have to provide CMAS, converting Congress' optional scheme into a mandatory one for these carriers.

While well-intentioned, this is an attempt to get the Lifeline tail to wag the network design dog. Implementing CMAS requires changes to a carrier's general core network, and is not limited to Lifeline. As such, for facilities-based carriers that did not elect to participate in CMAS, it substantially adds to the costs of participating in Lifeline, which will discourage Lifeline participation by facilities-based carriers, particularly smaller carriers (since the four nationwide carriers have implemented CMAS). Furthermore, this is a duty that would fall only on wireless carriers – which is counterproductive because wireless service can be much more important in reaching emergency responders when the consumer is away from his or her home or

⁶⁹ See *NPRM* ¶ 155 (“We seek comment on ways to increase Lifeline provider participation in WEA.”).

⁷⁰ See 47 C.F.R. 10.240-250.

office. The consumer is not better off if they can only get wireline Lifeline service, but then suffers from an emergency while on the road or trail – especially in areas such as Alaska with extreme and life-threatening weather conditions.

E. Any Training and Certification Requirements Should Focus on Personnel Making Final Eligibility Determinations, Rather Than All Customer-Facing Personnel.

Requiring that a company officer certify the training of all customer-facing personnel, and that all customer-facing personnel sign attestations as to training, and that the carrier keep all of these documents,⁷¹ will generate yet more paperwork burden for little benefit. Like other carriers, GCI separates the Lifeline sales function from the eligibility-review and approval function. The important control is on the latter, who receive specialized training and whose compensation does *not* depend on greater Lifeline sales. GCI does not object to requiring certification of training for these specialized quality control personnel who must sign off on all Lifeline applications – or to requiring training of all customer-facing personnel if the ETC does not create a quality control staff that reviews and makes a final eligibility determination for all Lifeline applicants.

Setting up the certification in this manner will put the incentives in the correct place, without creating an undue barrier to outreach to low-income consumers who would be helped by Lifeline. If structured as set forth above, an ETC would have an incentive to create a specialized quality control team, which will in any event be much more effective in screening eligibility than, for example, retail store personnel who are likely to have much higher turnover. On the

⁷¹ See *NPRM* ¶ 210 (“In order to increase ETC accountability and compliance with the Lifeline rules, we propose to require an officer of an ETC to certify on each FCC Form 497 that all individuals taking part in that ETC’s enrollment and recertification processes have received sufficient training on the Lifeline rules.”).

other hand, if the ETC does not follow the best practice of creating a separate quality control review, then it appropriately must bear the burden of training all its customer-facing personnel – which could be a reasonable approach if the provider was particularly small.

VII. CONCLUSION

Preventing fraud, waste, and abuse of USF resources is an essential goal, the achievement of which necessarily entails taking into account the importance of administrative simplicity and flexibility. Complex and impossible obligations will not further the mission of an effective program. The Commission can better address its concerns by taking unique state characteristics into account than by imposing burdensome new rules that could threaten Lifeline service for Lifeline’s neediest potential subscribers.

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