



July 29, 2015

Chairman Tom Wheeler
Commissioner Mignon Clyburn
Commissioner Ajit Pai
Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel
Commissioner Michael O’Rielly
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

Re: Broadband Lifeline Rate
Lifeline and Link Up Reform and Modernization, WC Docket No. 11-42
Telecommunications Carriers Eligible for Universal Service Support, WC Docket No. 09-197
Connect America Fund, WC Docket No. 10-90

Dear Chairman Wheeler, Commissioner Clyburn, Commissioner Pai,
Commissioner Rosenworcel, and Commissioner O’Rielly:

PolicyLink is committed to closing the Digital Divide because it is one of the most powerful strategies to help the next generation succeed in a competitive global economy. Access to affordable high-speed Internet at home is a vital tool to achieve this goal. We commend the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) for establishing a visionary path to empower all Americans with high-speed Internet access in the National Broadband Plan and we support your announcements to provide a widely-available affordable broadband rate for all low-income households through a Broadband Lifeline Program.

We know that you understand the importance of technology today to empower low-income residents in poor neighborhoods. More than 20% of all California households remain offline and in this Digital Age are being left behind at an accelerating pace—increasingly being disenfranchised from the democracy itself because so much government information and so many public services are online. According to the 2015 Annual Survey on broadband adoption in California (sponsored by the California Emerging Technology Fund and conducted by the Field Research Corporation), the Digital Divide persists for disadvantaged communities with large percentages of households not connected at home—35% of low-income households (under \$20,000 annual income); 30% of Latino families (37% for Spanish-speaking households); and 41% of people with disabilities. Yet, participation in daily life requires broadband access at home—job and college applications, school homework, healthcare coverage, workforce training, and education scholarships.

We also know that it takes a “trusted messenger” to reach offline households. Research shows that there are 3 primary barriers to broadband adoption: (1) Cost; (2) Relevance; and (3) Digital Literacy. An effective Broadband Lifeline Program must provide dedicated funding for community-based organizations (CBOs), schools and libraries to assist providers with in-language and in-

culture outreach, digital literacy training, and sign-ups for subscriptions to successfully close the Digital Divide. Further, there must be transparency and accountability to achieve tangible results. Therefore, we respectfully urge you to design a successful Broadband Lifeline Program by taking the following actions:

- Establish an affordable high-speed Internet service plan for all low-income households offered by and through all broadband providers (in the \$10/month range) with sufficient speeds and a wireless modem for compatibility with school-issued devices. A Broadband Lifeline Program should augment Telephone Lifeline and not force consumers to choose between the two necessary technologies and programs.
- Capitalize an independent fund to support community-based organizations (CBOs), schools and libraries (as “trusted messengers”) through performance-based grants to assist in enrolling eligible low-income households and participate in true public-private partnerships.
- Appoint an oversight advisory body to ensure transparency and accountability with a broad base of stakeholders and community leaders knowledgeable about broadband adoption.

We embrace the goal in the National Broadband Plan “to create a high-performance America—a more productive, creative, efficient America in which affordable broadband is available everywhere and everyone has the means and skills to use valuable broadband applications.” You have the opportunity to significantly move towards achieving this goal by enacting a workable Broadband Lifeline Program. We urge your bold action and we welcome the opportunity to work together to get all Californians and all Americans online.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Angela Blackwell', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Angela Glover Blackwell
Founder and CEO
PolicyLink