



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0529

February 11, 2016

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

Dear Chairman Wheeler:

We are writing in support of the FCC's proposal to modernize the Universal Service Fund's Lifeline program. In order to fulfill its purpose of meeting the changing needs of low-income Americans, the FCC should update the program to reflect the increasing importance of the Internet. Broadband has evolved to become an essential vehicle for expanding access to information, health services, educational resources, and employment opportunities. Often deprived of these opportunities due to the cost of broadband, low-income households are further disadvantaged in society.

To best serve these Americans, the Lifeline subsidy should be made portable to all telecommunications services whether offered as standalone services, or as bundle packages. This would allow the consumers to elect which service best meets their individual needs, applying the subsidy as a credit. Additionally, if a consumer is dissatisfied with a particular provider's service, they should be able to easily opt out and subscribe to another provider without transfer and disconnection fees. Not only would this best serve consumers and ensure they are receiving the best quality service at an affordable cost, but it would also encourage competition among providers to provide the best plan.

The FCC should also provide guidance on the program that discourages providers from using the Lifeline program as a means to commit consumers to long term billing relationships. The program should avoid requiring credit checks, banking account requirements, and disclosure of subscription history. Additionally, an ideal Lifeline broadband plan would be one that does not require the subscriber to contribute anything more than the subsidy. Under the basic, entry-level broadband subscription contract, consumers would not be required to make any investment in the providers' services, but they would also not be discouraged from upgrading their plans in the future should their needs change. The Commission should also instruct participating providers not to levy conversion or installation fees that would essentially be punishing the subscribers for taking advantage of the Lifeline program.

The broadband services available to the eligible households should not sacrifice quality for affordability. The standard would allow for functional, not subpar, internet access to define the entry-level Lifeline plan. Its flexibility would reflect evolving provider capability, program requirements, and support for higher speeds. The standard should also be relative to the capacity of an area as to prevent consumers from being excluded from applying to Lifeline because their community does not have the infrastructure to support higher speeds. Establishing a minimum standard prevents providers from taking advantage of the subsidy by offering second-class service that would not best serve the digital needs of an average American.

Acknowledging that many people access the Internet through their wireless devices, the FCC should include wireless Internet coverage under the Lifeline program to increase broadband accessibility for households. To account for the different capabilities of the two services, respective minimum standards should be established for each service. The standard for wireless should avoid small data caps, as well, to avoid overages resulting in fees for the consumer.

Rather than allowing providers to oversee the eligibility verification of consumers as the Lifeline program expands to include broadband, the FCC should streamline the process with preexisting databases for other federal assistance programs. This coordination would allow for co-enrollment, as many consumers eligible for programs such as SNAP or TANF would also be eligible to subscribe for Lifeline, but it would not eliminate the income-level qualifier. The process would remove the burden from qualifying Americans by simplifying the application process for not only Lifeline, but other assistance programs as well, and it would help improve program integrity.

We applaud the Commission's efforts to bring the Lifeline program up to date to 21st century standards with its proposed inclusion of broadband service. With this new service, low-income Americans would have the means necessary to access essential health and social services, educational resources, employment information, and communication networks. We encourage the Commission to implement the expansion as soon as possible, as we cannot be inactive and allow the digital divide to further deepen at the expense of the 53% of low-income households without broadband access.

Sincerely,



MARK TAKANO
Member of Congress



KEITH ELLISON
Member of Congress



RAÚL M. GRIJALVA
Member of Congress



ALMA ADAMS
Member of Congress



KAREN BASS
Member of Congress



JOYCE BEATTY
Member of Congress



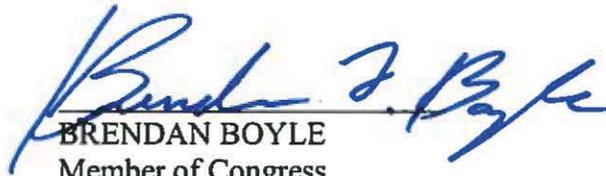
XAVIER BECERRA
Member of Congress



EARL BLUMENAUER
Member of Congress



SUZANNE BONAMICI
Member of Congress



BRENDAN BOYLE
Member of Congress



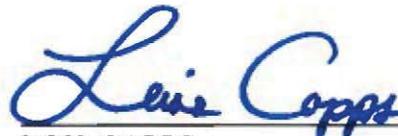
CORRINE BROWN
Member of Congress



CHERI BUSTOS
Member of Congress



G.K. BUTTERFIELD
Member of Congress



LOIS CAPPS
Member of Congress



MICHAEL CAPUANO
Member of Congress



TONY CARDENAS
Member of Congress



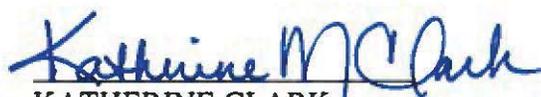
MATT CARTWRIGHT
Member of Congress



JUDY CHU
Member of Congress



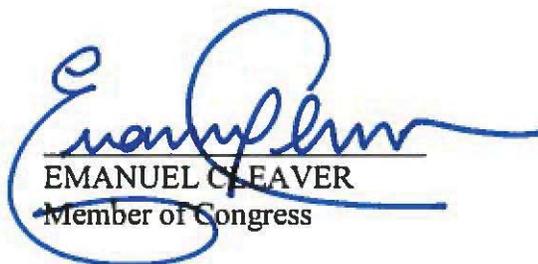
DAVID CICILLINE
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KATHERINE CLARK
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STEVE COHEN
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JIM COSTA
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ELIJAH CUMMINGS
Member of Congress



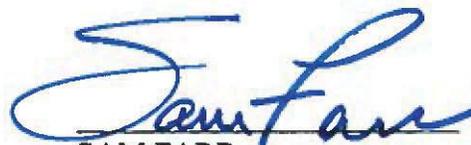
ROSA DELAURO
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DONNA EDWARDS
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BARBARA LEE
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STACEY PLASKETT
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MARK POCAN
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CHARLES RANGEL
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CEDRIC RICHMOND
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TIM RYAN
Member of Congress



LINDA SANCHEZ
Member of Congress



JANICE SCHAKOWSKY
Member of Congress



BOBBY SCOTT
Member of Congress



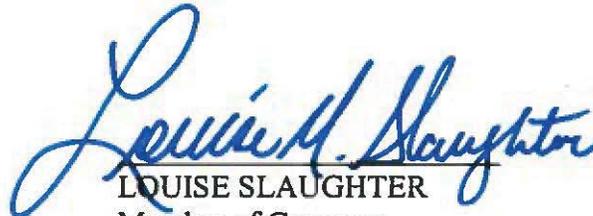
JOSE SERRANO
Member of Congress



TERRI SEWELL
Member of Congress



BRAD SHERMAN
Member of Congress



LOUISE SLAUGHTER
Member of Congress



MARK TAKAI
Member of Congress



BENNIE THOMPSON
Member of Congress



DINA TITUS
Member of Congress



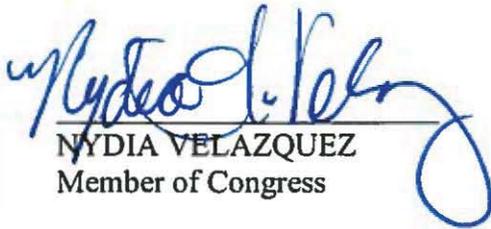
PAUL TONKO
Member of Congress



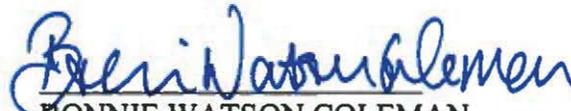
CHRIS VAN HOLLEN
Member of Congress



MARC VEASEY
Member of Congress



NYDIA VELAZQUEZ
Member of Congress



BONNIE WATSON COLEMAN
Member of Congress



JOHN YARMUTH
Member of Congress



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 21, 2016

The Honorable Alma Adams
U.S. House of Representatives
222 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Adams:

Thank you for your letter in support of the Commission's efforts to modernize the universal service Lifeline program. I share your desire to ensure that Lifeline continues to assist low income consumers with access to affordable communications services. Your views are very important and will be included in the record of the proceeding and considered as part of the Commission's review.

I wholeheartedly agree that broadband has evolved to become an essential vehicle for expanding access to information, health services, educational resources, and employment opportunities. And while it is clear that broadband has become essential in today's society, affordability remains a major barrier to adoption by low-income consumers. That is why transforming Lifeline for the 21st century is key to the future of this vital program.

Earlier this month, working closely with Commissioner Clyburn, I circulated a proposed Order for my colleagues' consideration that would modernize the Commission's Lifeline program to make broadband more affordable for low-income Americans. At the same time, the proposed Order would put in place a number of key programmatic reforms designed to protect the integrity of the Lifeline program and build on the Commission's recent efforts to root out waste, fraud, and abuse in the program. The Order will be considered at the FCC's March 31 Open Meeting.

The proposed Order takes a number of the steps you recommend to address the broadband affordability gap. For example, for the first time, low income consumers could, as you suggest, apply the \$9.25 per month support to stand-alone broadband service, as well as bundled voice and data service packages. In addition, the Order would free up the Lifeline marketplace to encourage wide participation in the program by broadband providers, giving consumers competitive service options. And the proposed Order would put in place minimum service standards to ensure that eligible subscribers' benefits are directed only to quality services that are worthy of universal service funding.

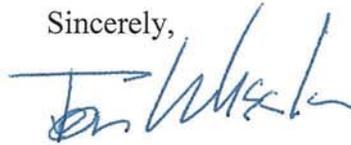
The Order also would take important steps to further ensure program integrity. Specifically, it would refine the list of federal programs that may be used to validate Lifeline eligibility to those that support electronic validation, are most accountable, and best identify people needing support (SNAP, SSI, Medicaid, Veterans Pension and Tribal), along with

income-based eligibility. The Order would also establish a National Eligibility Verifier that would remove telecommunications carriers from the process of making eligibility determinations. I expect that these changes will make Lifeline a truly 21st Century program that effectively and responsibly makes broadband service accessible for low-income households.

While the Order on circulation takes many of your recommended steps, I recognize that it may not take all of them. Nonetheless, I am heartened that we agree completely on the critical need to modernize the Lifeline program for a digital era and to do so as soon as possible. The proposed Lifeline Order was designed with two equally important goals in mind—to help connect low-income Americans to the Internet and to ensure the fiscal integrity of the program going forward. We need not choose between the two. We can—and must—have both. And we can—and must—do so now.

I appreciate your interest in this matter. Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

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Tom Wheeler



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 21, 2016

The Honorable Karen Bass
U.S. House of Representatives
408 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congresswoman Bass:

Thank you for your letter in support of the Commission's efforts to modernize the universal service Lifeline program. I share your desire to ensure that Lifeline continues to assist low income consumers with access to affordable communications services. Your views are very important and will be included in the record of the proceeding and considered as part of the Commission's review.

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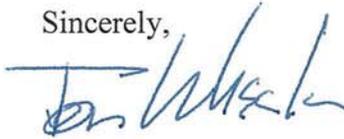
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Tom Wheeler



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 21, 2016

The Honorable Joyce Beatty
U.S. House of Representatives
133 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congresswoman Beatty:

Thank you for your letter in support of the Commission's efforts to modernize the universal service Lifeline program. I share your desire to ensure that Lifeline continues to assist low income consumers with access to affordable communications services. Your views are very important and will be included in the record of the proceeding and considered as part of the Commission's review.

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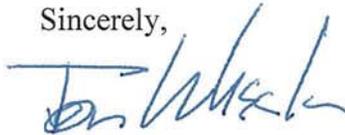
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Tom Wheeler



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 21, 2016

The Honorable Xavier Becerra
U.S. House of Representatives
1226 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Becerra:

Thank you for your letter in support of the Commission's efforts to modernize the universal service Lifeline program. I share your desire to ensure that Lifeline continues to assist low income consumers with access to affordable communications services. Your views are very important and will be included in the record of the proceeding and considered as part of the Commission's review.

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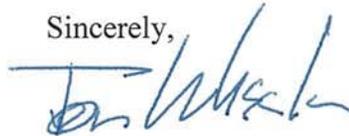
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Tom Wheeler



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 21, 2016

The Honorable Earl Blumenauer
U.S. House of Representatives
1111 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Blumenauer:

Thank you for your letter in support of the Commission's efforts to modernize the universal service Lifeline program. I share your desire to ensure that Lifeline continues to assist low income consumers with access to affordable communications services. Your views are very important and will be included in the record of the proceeding and considered as part of the Commission's review.

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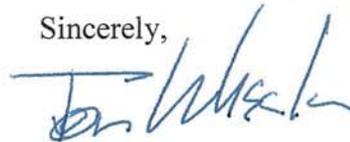
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Tom Wheeler



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 21, 2016

The Honorable Suzanne Bonamici
U.S. House of Representatives
439 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congresswoman Bonamici:

Thank you for your letter in support of the Commission's efforts to modernize the universal service Lifeline program. I share your desire to ensure that Lifeline continues to assist low income consumers with access to affordable communications services. Your views are very important and will be included in the record of the proceeding and considered as part of the Commission's review.

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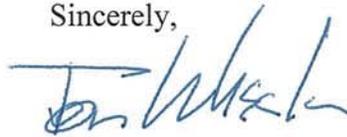
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Tom Wheeler



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WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 21, 2016

The Honorable Corrine Brown
U.S. House of Representatives
2111 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congresswoman Brown:

Thank you for your letter in support of the Commission's efforts to modernize the universal service Lifeline program. I share your desire to ensure that Lifeline continues to assist low income consumers with access to affordable communications services. Your views are very important and will be included in the record of the proceeding and considered as part of the Commission's review.

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Earlier this month, working closely with Commissioner Clyburn, I circulated a proposed Order for my colleagues' consideration that would modernize the Commission's Lifeline program to make broadband more affordable for low-income Americans. At the same time, the proposed Order would put in place a number of key programmatic reforms designed to protect the integrity of the Lifeline program and build on the Commission's recent efforts to root out waste, fraud, and abuse in the program. The Order will be considered at the FCC's March 31 Open Meeting.

The proposed Order takes a number of the steps you recommend to address the broadband affordability gap. For example, for the first time, low income consumers could, as you suggest, apply the \$9.25 per month support to stand-alone broadband service, as well as bundled voice and data service packages. In addition, the Order would free up the Lifeline marketplace to encourage wide participation in the program by broadband providers, giving consumers competitive service options. And the proposed Order would put in place minimum service standards to ensure that eligible subscribers' benefits are directed only to quality services that are worthy of universal service funding.

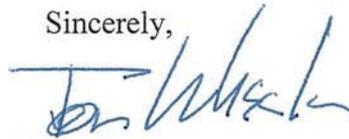
The Order also would take important steps to further ensure program integrity. Specifically, it would refine the list of federal programs that may be used to validate Lifeline eligibility to those that support electronic validation, are most accountable, and best identify people needing support (SNAP, SSI, Medicaid, Veterans Pension and Tribal), along with

income-based eligibility. The Order would also establish a National Eligibility Verifier that would remove telecommunications carriers from the process of making eligibility determinations. I expect that these changes will make Lifeline a truly 21st Century program that effectively and responsibly makes broadband service accessible for low-income households.

While the Order on circulation takes many of your recommended steps, I recognize that it may not take all of them. Nonetheless, I am heartened that we agree completely on the critical need to modernize the Lifeline program for a digital era and to do so as soon as possible. The proposed Lifeline Order was designed with two equally important goals in mind—to help connect low-income Americans to the Internet and to ensure the fiscal integrity of the program going forward. We need not choose between the two. We can—and must—have both. And we can—and must—do so now.

I appreciate your interest in this matter. Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Tom Wheeler". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "T" and a long, horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Tom Wheeler



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 21, 2016

The Honorable Brendan F. Boyle
U.S. House of Representatives
118 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Boyle:

Thank you for your letter in support of the Commission's efforts to modernize the universal service Lifeline program. I share your desire to ensure that Lifeline continues to assist low income consumers with access to affordable communications services. Your views are very important and will be included in the record of the proceeding and considered as part of the Commission's review.

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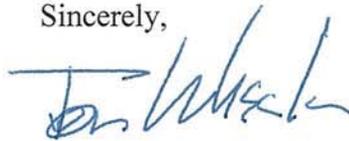
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Tom Wheeler



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 21, 2016

The Honorable Cheri Bustos
U.S. House of Representatives
1009 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congresswoman Bustos:

Thank you for your letter in support of the Commission's efforts to modernize the universal service Lifeline program. I share your desire to ensure that Lifeline continues to assist low income consumers with access to affordable communications services. Your views are very important and will be included in the record of the proceeding and considered as part of the Commission's review.

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