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July 6, 2010

Ms. Marlene H. Dortch  
Secretary  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 – 12th Street SW  
Washington, DC 20544

Docket No. 96-45

Dear Ms. Dortch:

I am writing on behalf of the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA), our members and all low-income and hard of hearing consumers, to support efforts that help provide free prepaid wireless Lifeline telecommunication service to low-income consumers. Hundreds of thousands of hard of hearing, low-income consumers could benefit greatly from this service, receiving the telephone access they need (and a hearing aid compatible phone), at an affordable rate.

The Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) is the nation's leading grassroots organization representing the rights of people with hearing loss. The HLAA mission is to open the world of communication to people with hearing loss through information, education, advocacy, and support. HLAA impacts accessibility, public policy, research, public awareness, and service delivery related to hearing loss on a national and local level. HLAA's national support network includes 200 local chapters nationwide, 14 state organizations and an office in Bethesda, Maryland.

The federal government's Lifeline program was created 25 years ago to ensure that low income people had phone service. People who qualify – generally, those at the poverty level and eligible for food stamps – usually pay about half of the monthly cost for phone service. Despite the discount, only a third of households eligible for the discount Lifeline program use it, according to current national Federal Communication Commission reports.

Research has shown that phone service increases employment opportunities, not to mention making life easier, safer and more enjoyable. Allowing wireless Lifeline service has other benefits for low-income consumers, in particular. Because of economic and social factors, often low-income consumers may not remain in one residential location for extended periods of time. Wireless devices can relieve consumers of the need to frequently have their landline Lifeline phones service reconnected after each move – a cost saving approach.



While HLAA does not endorse any specific company's efforts, we applaud efforts to expand the current Lifeline system to include wireless prepaid phone providers, like TracFone Wireless' Safelink program currently operating in 23 states. It is important to us that low income people with hearing loss will have access to hearing aid compatible wireless handsets. Any carriers able to meet the service obligations of Lifeline – and offering hearing aid compatible phones – should be permitted to serve Lifeline customers so that low income Americans have the same access to wireless and competitive services as do other consumers.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

*Brenda Battat*

Brenda Battat  
Executive Director