House of Representatives

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April 20, 2011

Chairman Julius Genachowski
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Re: Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service Lifeline and Link Up
CC Docket No. 96-45; WC Docket 03-109; WC Docket 11-42

Dear Chairman Genachowski:

I write today to commend the efforts of the Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service and Lifeline and Link Up. We believe the Lifeline program provides an invaluable service to low-income constituents in our districts and across the country. We are pleased the Board has decided to look for ways to minimize fraud, waste and abuse in the program so that deserving and qualified families will still have access to this important program.

As our nation struggles to overcome unemployment and other economic challenges, the Lifeline program is more invaluable than ever. Reports both academic and anecdotal have shown that access to phone service leads to greater chances of employment. Residents in our districts and nationwide, should be able to access these services in the case of an emergency.

We wholeheartedly agree with the Board's recommendations that the Commission put together a plan for uniformity on areas that would apply to all Eligible Telecommunications Carriers (ETCs) that would help eliminate waste and abuse in this program. In doing so, however, we want to make sure that low-income support of the fund remains strong. Our concern is that this beneficial program remains accessible and free to those who qualify.

Low-income support is cyclical and this should be acknowledged. As you may be aware, unemployment has grown by 6% in my state since 2008 and those eligible for SNAP assistance has also grown significantly. In these challenging economic times, programs such as Lifeline have a real and tangible impact on the lives of our constituents and we would like the Commission to recognize this, as we believe they do. As this recession begins to recede, the numbers of those eligible for Lifeline should also drop accordingly.

Collectively, we urge the Commission to adopt the recommendations from the Federal-State Joint Board, as we would like to see these programs be sustainable in the short and long-term. Our only concern is that the Commission should not adopt policies that cap funding for low-income support or hinder competition in an already underserved market. For example, the FCC should not mandate (even minimal) monthly subscriber fees for Lifeline users, which would present an undue administrative burden on both carriers and consumers. The best approach to curtailing fraud and abuse is establishment of an eligibility database.

Thank you for your service to our constituents. We hope that the FCC will take strong action to ensure that Lifeline services remain available to the individuals who need them most.

Sincerely,

Stacey Abrams

Debbie Buckner

Bonnie W. Thomas

Carolyn F. Hughes

Margaret Hanse

Nikki J. Randall

Karla L. Wheeler

Stephanie S. Benfield

Carol H. Fullerton

Glenn Baker

Earnest G. Smith

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Wm. J. [illegible]

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[illegible] Dillis

Simone Bell

Pamela Dickerson

[illegible] Parent

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