

**Before the
Federal Communications Commission
Washington, D.C. 20554**

In the Matter of)	
)	
Lifeline and Link Up Reform and Modernization)	WC Docket No. 11-42
)	
Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service)	CC Docket No. 96-45
)	
Lifeline and Link Up)	WC Docket No. 03-109

REPLY COMMENTS OF VIASAT, INC.

ViaSat, Inc. (“ViaSat”) replies to the comments filed in this proceeding on April 21, 2011, which address matters raised in the *Notice of Proposed Rulemaking* adopted by the Commission on March 4, 2011. A broad range of commenters share ViaSat’s view that the existing Low-Income program should be modernized so that it supports telecommunications and broadband services in a manner that is both competitively and technologically neutral.¹ Indeed, the record reflects widespread support for reforms that would “allow *any* provider of voice and broadband services to provide Lifeline and Link Up discounts to eligible low-income consumers.”²

A number of commenters recognize the valuable contribution that satellite broadband providers can make in extending telecommunications and broadband services to low-income consumers, particularly in unserved areas. For example, USTelecom argues that

¹ See Comments of ViaSat, Inc. (filed Apr. 21, 2011).

² See, e.g., Comments of the National Cable & Telecommunications Association, at 4 (filed Apr. 21, 2011) (emphasis supplied); Comments of CTIA—The Wireless Association, at 25 (filed Apr. 21, 2011).

“[s]atellite broadband should be eligible” for participation in the Low-Income program because “[c]ompetition and customer choice would be maximized by allowing the customer to select among any qualifying broadband service.”³ Similarly, Iridium urges the Commission “to remain mindful of the important role satellite offerings can play” in controlling the size of the universal service fund.⁴ Like these commenters, ViaSat believes that a competitively and technologically neutral approach to the reform of the Low-Income program will expand consumer choice, promote competition in the marketplace, and ensure that telecommunications and broadband services are extended to low-income consumers in the most timely and cost-effective manner possible.

Notwithstanding the acknowledged benefits of allowing satellite providers to participate fully in any updated Low-Income program, two commenters (GCI and NASUCA) suggest that satellite-delivered service would be inadequate. Critically, their comments are based on the perceived shortcomings of *existing* satellite services,⁵ and they wholly ignore the continuing technological progress and substantial investments being made in next-generation satellites that will fully address those perceived shortcomings.⁶

This summer, ViaSat will launch ViaSat-1—the highest-capacity broadband satellite in the world—which will transform the nature of today’s satellite-delivered broadband service by offering the highest speeds and best quality of broadband service ever offered by a

³ Comments of the United States Telecom Association, at 24 (filed Apr. 21, 2011).

⁴ Comments of Iridium Satellite LLC, at 3 (filed Apr. 21, 2011).

⁵ Notably, the Commission already has determined that satellite providers are eligible for support even with these limitations. *See Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, Report and Order, 12 FCC Rcd 8776, at ¶ 145 (1997).

⁶ *See* Comments of the National Association of State Utility Consumer Advocates, at 26-27 (filed Apr. 21, 2011) (“NASUCA Comments”); Comments of General Communication, Inc., at 21 (filed Apr. 21, 2011) (“GCI Comments”).

satellite platform, at prices and performance levels that are competitive with many terrestrial alternatives. Services offered over ViaSat-1 and other next-generation broadband satellites will be particularly well-suited for the most popular consumer broadband applications; indeed ViaSat's satellite broadband offering will be comparable to most wireless services with respect to latency and superior in terms of jitter.⁷ As ViaSat demonstrated at the Commission during the April 27 workshop on USF reform, Voice over Internet Protocol ("VoIP") calls can be transmitted via satellite with the same level of quality and reliability as voice calls transmitted via terrestrial wireless networks.⁸

Moreover, these services will be available at speeds of 4/1 Mbps and even 12/3 Mbps throughout ViaSat-1's footprint, which covers about 63 percent of the households in Alaska. The substantial capacity available over ViaSat-1 will enable ViaSat to provide a high-quality and economical broadband service directly to the homes of many unserved consumers, thus offering an effective alternative to deploying costly terrestrial facilities in the area. That being said, ViaSat will continue to utilize available resources and partnership opportunities to provide service in the most cost-effective manner possible. For example, ViaSat's gateways near Juneau and Anchorage, Alaska connect to the Internet over terrestrial backhaul circuits provided by GCI itself. Thus, GCI's partnership with ViaSat to bring high-speed satellite-delivered broadband to Alaska demonstrates the falsity of GCI's claim that 4/1 Mbps satellite services in Alaska are "unachievable absent substantial investment in terrestrial middle mile facilities."⁹

⁷ See Comments of ViaSat, Inc., WC Docket No. 10-90, at 32 (filed Apr. 18, 2011).

⁸ Cf. NASUCA Comments at 27.

⁹ GCI Comments at 21. It may make good policy sense to facilitate investment in terrestrial middle-mile facilities in Alaska. Whether and how that occurs, of course, has nothing to do with the performance capabilities of the next-generation satellite broadband

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For the reasons set forth herein and in ViaSat’s opening comments, the Commission should reform the existing Low-Income program in a manner that is both competitively and technologically neutral and that leverages the capabilities of next-generation broadband satellites to serve low-income consumers.

Respectfully submitted,

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networks that are being launched starting this summer—networks that will close the digital divide for low-income consumers in Alaska starting this year.