

**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 THE BENTON FOUNDATION AND ACCESS HUMBOLDT

The Benton Foundation and Access Humboldt respectfully submit these comments in response to the Federal Communications Commission’s Notice of Proposed Rulemaking regarding changes to the Lifeline and Link-Up programs¹.

The Benton Foundation² works to ensure that media and telecommunications serve the public interest and enhance our democracy. Benton pursues this mission by seeking policy solutions that support the values of access, diversity and equity, and by demonstrating the value of media and telecommunications for improving the quality of life for all. Benton has also served as a

¹ *Lifeline and Link Up Reform and Modernization, Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service, Lifeline and Link Up*, WC Docket No. 11-42, CC Docket No. 96-45 and WC Docket No. 03-109, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, FCC 11-32 (rel. March 4, 2011) (“*NPRM*”)

² www.benton.org, Benton Foundation public filings, including but not limited to these reply comments, represent the institutional view of the Foundation as opposed to the views of any individual officer or director.

member of the Federal Communication Commission's (Commission) Consumer Advisory Committee (CAC), through which Benton is a member of the broadband subcommittee. Benton has long advocated for the ubiquitous telecommunications access for all citizens.

Access Humboldt³ is a non-profit, community based, public service media organization formed in April 2006 to manage local cable franchise benefits on behalf of the County of Humboldt, California and the Cities of Eureka, Arcata, Fortuna, Rio Dell, Ferndale and Blue Lake. Access Humboldt's mission is "Local voices through community media." We are an innovative, self-sustaining and trusted media resource for residents of Humboldt County. Access Humboldt seeks to connect diverse community members to local access media resources to engage in meaningful conversations that increase participation in civic life.

Introduction

While our reply comments focus on the shifting of the Lifeline and Link Up programs to include broadband and the implementation of pilot programs, our original comments also highlighted the need for reforms in administration, opposition to a capping of the programs, an expansion of the eligible telecommunication carrier designation to include anchor institutions and the suggestion that the Commission consider shifting funding from the Universal Service Fund currently allocated to the High Cost portion to be re-allocated for the Lifeline and Link Up programs.⁴

³ <http://accesshumboldt.net>

⁴ Comments of the Benton Foundation, Lifeline and Link Up Reform and Modernization, WC Dkt. No. 11-42 (April. 21, 2011)(Benton Comments).

I. **The FCC should move quickly to include broadband services as a part of Lifeline and Link Up programs**

Commenters stress that Lifeline and Link Up could provide a long-term approach to closing the digital divide.⁵ The Minority Media and Telecommunications Council (MMTC) comments highlight that the Lifeline and Linkup programs have the unique ability to provide both subsidies and adoption support.⁶

Indeed we agree that with careful planning the Commission can create a program that utilizes community anchor institutions to both provide service and stand as a central location for adoption-related programs. Unlike one-shot broadband programs that provide limited funding, Lifeline and Link Up can provide a long-term broadband safety net for our most vulnerable populations. Comments from National Consumer Law Center (NCLC) highlight the importance of a program that is crafted to take advantage of efficiencies from partnerships with existing social service programs.⁷

Clearly, a Broadband Lifeline and Link Up program will look substantially different from today's telephone program. Because of the different needs of broadband adoption, it's critical that the Commission create an extensive broadband pilot program.

⁵ One Economy at 26.

⁶ MMTC Comments at 2-3

⁷ Consumer Groups comments at 44-45.

II. **The FCC should move quickly to properly fund and implement an extensive series of pilot programs to test out broadband Lifeline and Link Up programs**

Because of the different needs of broadband adoption, it is critical that the FCC create an extensive broadband pilot program. Commenters highlight the need for careful planning as the programs begin to shift towards broadband adoption. Many of the comments mention the need for more than just subsidies.⁸

One Economy's comments highlight the need for robust community participation for long-term adoption.⁹ MMTC highlights the opportunities for pilot projects that would include public-private partnerships in HUD facilities, and pilot projects that work on a reverse auction basis.¹⁰

While Benton et al welcome the idea of new public-private opportunities; we believe that the Commission should make an effort to work with parties that are currently locked out of USF programs. Large carriers and incumbents should be considered for some pilots, but a real exploration of the opportunities in broadband should test out community anchor institutions as providers, non-profits to engage the community in adoption education programs, and programs that meld various state social programs with Lifeline and Link Up. We urge the Commission to avoid

⁸ Mass DTC at 11, NJ Division of Rate Counsel at 25, 27; DC PSC at 7-8; Open Access Connections et al at 7; AT&T at 20, 22; GCI at 53; Cox at 10; MIPSC at 11; IndianaURPat at 13; NYC at 1-4; NY PSC at 5-6; LCHR at 9-10; MAG-Net at 21; MMTC at 10; NATOA at 4; Cricket at 17, TracFone at 44-45, CTIA at 25-29, CenturyLink at 24-25; SBI at 6-7; Cox at 10, NCTA at 2, 4, One Economy at 22; IURC at 13-14; MDTC at 11; PUCO Staff at 28-29; USTelecom Comments at 22-26.

⁹ One Economy Notice of Ex Parte, Lifeline Link Up, WC Docket No. 03-109 (Feb. 10, 2011) (One Economy Notice of Ex Parte). See also One Economy Comments at 23.

¹⁰ MMTC at 10

handing over all the pilot program opportunities to the current carriers, but rather, truly explore new options for adoption.

State commenters highlight the need for caution when developing a program that may add unfunded burdens to the state social service system.¹¹ Understanding this pitfall, Benton et al believes that the Commission should engage with both state and other federal agencies for comments and insight while choosing and developing potential pilots. Well-designed pilots that engage with state social service programs could help illuminate the potential benefits and negatives involved with Lifeline Link Up partnerships for broadband adoption.

Conclusion

We thank the Commission for this opportunity to comment on the changes to Lifeline and Link Up. As the Commission finishes its review of this docket, we urge the agency to quickly begin the work related to development and implementation of the broadband pilot programs.

|s|

Amina Fazlullah
Policy Counsel
Benton Foundation
amina@benton.org
(650) 814-8003

May 25, 2011

¹¹ State of Alaska Comments at page 2.