

April 25, 2013

The Honorable Greg Walden, Chairman
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
Committee on Energy and Commerce
2182 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Anna Eshoo, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
Committee on Energy and Commerce
241 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Walden and Ranking Member Eshoo:

We write today to express our support for the Universal Service Fund's Lifeline program. Consumers Union, the policy and advocacy arm of *Consumer Reports*, believes the program plays a key role in expanding the benefits of communications service to those who would otherwise be unable to afford them. We also write to support the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in its recent efforts to address problems of waste, fraud, and abuse. These efforts have already resulted in \$200 million of savings and will continue to save millions, while ensuring that the funds are targeted to consumers who need telecommunications services the most.

We also write to express concern about any proposals to exclude wireless from the Lifeline program. To do so would be to deprive the millions of low-income families who depend on cell phones for basic access to vital telecommunications services. The importance of this program is especially clear in light of the consumers' increasing shift away from landline service. Many Americans are choosing to "cut the cord" and replace their landline phones with mobile wireless service: by the second half of 2012, thirty-four percent of adults lived in wireless-only households.¹ Others – including many consumers in rural areas, low-income communities, and communities of color – rely on their cell phones as their only means of accessing the Internet.

We support the FCC in its efforts to transition the program to support broadband so that the Commission can bring all citizens online. As the National Broadband Plan identified, our nation currently faces a "Broadband Availability Gap," leaving millions of Americans unable to realize the economic, educational, entrepreneurial, and social

¹ See *Implementation of Section 6002(b) of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993, Annual Report and Analysis of Competitive Market Conditions With Respect to Mobile Wireless, Including Commercial Mobile Services*, WT Docket No. 11-186, Sixteenth Report, FCC 13-34 (rel. Mar. 21, 2013).

benefits that flow from access to these services. The FCC should work to get affordable broadband to as many people as possible, without leaving behind low-income consumers and the groups who need it the most.

We appreciate your consideration of these issues to ensure that all consumers are able reap the benefits of access to telecommunications service.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Delara Derakhshani', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Delara Derakhshani
Policy Counsel
Washington Office