

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
Telecommunications Carriers Eligible for Universal ) WC Docket No. 09-197
Service Support )
Connect America Fund ) WC Docket No. 10-90

ORDER

Adopted: July 1, 2026

Released: July 1, 2026

By the Chief, Wireline Competition Bureau:

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In this Order, the Wireline Competition Bureau (Bureau) issues a waiver pausing both the phase-out of Lifeline program support for voice-only services and changes to the Lifeline minimum service standards. As discussed below, we find good cause to pause these adjustments for a year because the Commission is undergoing a rulemaking proceeding that seeks comment on these issues and could result in changes to the Lifeline program.

II. BACKGROUND

2. In the 2016 Lifeline Order, the Commission revised the Lifeline program to phase-in increasing broadband minimum service standards and phase-out Lifeline support for voice-only service. The Commission took these actions with the intent to "avoid undue consumer disruption and to allow Lifeline providers sufficient time to adjust operations as the Commission moves from a primarily voice-only Lifeline program to a Lifeline program embracing broadband services."

3. The 2016 Lifeline Order established a three-step schedule by which Lifeline support for voice-only service would be decreased before ending entirely, which so far has led to voice-only support being reduced to \$5.25. The final step was to be a complete phase-out of Lifeline support for voice-only

1 See Lifeline and Link Up Reform and Modernization et al., WC Docket No. 11-42, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, FCC 26-8 (Feb. 23, 2026) (2026 Lifeline NPRM). Questions under the Commission's consideration include whether to continue retaining support for services that meet only the voice minimum service standard on a temporary or permanent basis, new initial minimum service standards, and new minimum service standards update methodologies. See 2026 Lifeline NPRM at 16-23, paras. 43-60.

2 See Lifeline and Link Up Reform and Modernization et al., WC Docket No. 11-42, Order on Reconsideration, 31 FCC Rcd 3962, 3981-87, 3989-97, paras. 52-67, 73-98 (2016) (2016 Lifeline Report and Order).

3 Id. at 3985, para. 62.

4 Id. at 3986, para. 64; 47 CFR § 54.403(a)(2). The Commission took the first of the three steps December 1, 2019, when voice-only support reduced to \$7.25 from the full \$9.25 support amount, and the second step on December 1, 2020, when voice-only support reduced to \$5.25. 2016 Lifeline Report and Order, 31 FCC Rcd at 3986, para. 64; 47 CFR §§ 54.403(a)(2)(ii)-(iii).

services on December 1, 2021, when support for such services was to be eliminated in most areas.<sup>5</sup> However, the Bureau issued a waiver pausing the phase-out before support elimination occurred due in large part to many Lifeline subscribers' continued reliance on voice service and has maintained this pause each year since through one-year waiver extensions.<sup>6</sup> The most recent waiver is currently still in effect and ends on December 1, 2026.<sup>7</sup>

4. The Commission also created broadband capacity minimum service standards in the *2016 Lifeline Order* effectuated through update mechanisms for the fixed and mobile broadband speed and data capacity standards to provide predictable improvements to these offerings.<sup>8</sup> In prior years, the Commission has waived the mobile broadband capacity minimum service standard when it determined that doing so would be necessary to prevent service costs from rising to unaffordable levels.<sup>9</sup>

5. The Commission is currently considering recommendations to revise certain Lifeline rules in its *2026 Lifeline NPRM*, released on February 23, 2026.<sup>10</sup> The *2026 Lifeline NPRM* launched a comprehensive review of the Lifeline program and seeks comment on support for voice-only service and the minimum service standards and their updated mechanisms.<sup>11</sup> In the *NPRM*, the Commission asked whether it should maintain voice-only service support at the current \$5.25 amount and the justifications for doing so, including “[h]ow vital is voice service to consumers’ ability to access public safety resources or to participate in today’s society” and whether these subscribers would be able to fulfill these needs through alternative services.<sup>12</sup> The Commission also requested comment on Lifeline minimum service standards, including whether the current minimum service standards meet the needs of Lifeline subscribers, increasing minimum service standards could lead to prohibitively expensive plans or providers leaving the program, update mechanisms should exist, and these mechanisms should update the minimum service standards at set or variable amounts, among other issues.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *2016 Lifeline Order*, 31 FCC Rcd at 3986, para. 64; 47 CFR § 54.403(a)(2)(iv).

<sup>6</sup> See *Lifeline and Link Up Reform and Modernization et al.*, WC Docket No. 11-42, Order, 36 FCC Rcd 15539, 15545-47, paras. 13-18 (WCB 2021) (*2021 Waiver Order*); *Lifeline and Link Up Reform and Modernization et al.*, WC Docket Nos. 11-42, Order, 37 FCC Rcd 7692, 7697-99, 5-8, paras. 12-22 (WCB 2022) (*2022 Waiver Order*); *Lifeline and Link Up Reform and Modernization et al.*, WC Docket Nos. 11-42 et al., Order, 38 FCC Rcd 6096, 6100-02, paras. 11-17 (WCB 2023) (*2023 Waiver Order*); *Lifeline and Link Up Reform and Modernization et al.*, WC Docket Nos. 11-42 et al., Order, 39 FCC Rcd 7000, 7004-05, paras. 12-13 (WCB 2024) (*2024 Waiver Order*); *Lifeline and Link Up Reform and Modernization et al.*, WC Docket Nos. 11-42 et al., Order, 40 FCC Rcd 4325, 4328, paras. 11-12 (WCB 2025) (*2025 Waiver Order*).

<sup>7</sup> See *2025 Waiver Order*, 40 FCC Rcd at 4327-28, paras. 9-10.

<sup>8</sup> See *2016 Lifeline Order*, 31 FCC Rcd at 3998, 3990-91, 3993-94, 3997, paras. 70, 77, 88-90, 97-98.

<sup>9</sup> See *Lifeline and Link Up Reform and Modernization et al.*, WC Docket Nos. 11-42, Order, 34 FCC Rcd 11020, 11022-24, paras. 8-13 (2019); *Lifeline and Link Up Reform and Modernization et al.*, WC Docket Nos. 11-42, Order, 35 FCC Rcd 12958, 1296-63, paras. 9-15 (WCB 2020); *2021 Waiver Order*, 36 FCC Rcd at 15546-47, paras. 19-23; *2022 Waiver Order*, 37 FCC Rcd at 7698-99, paras. 18-22; *2023 Waiver Order*, 38 FCC Rcd 6101-02, paras. 14-17; *2024 Waiver Order*, 39 FCC Rcd at 7005-06, paras. 14-16; *2025 Waiver Order*, 40 FCC Rcd at 4328-29, paras. 13-15.

<sup>10</sup> *2026 Lifeline NPRM*.

<sup>11</sup> *Id.* at 15-23, paras. 43-60.

<sup>12</sup> *Id.* at 22, para. 59.

<sup>13</sup> See *id.* at 15-21, paras. 43-56.

### III. DISCUSSION

6. The Bureau acts on its own motion to waive the implementation of the phase-out in Lifeline support for voice-only services and the increase in Lifeline minimum service standards for one year, until December 1, 2027. In evaluating whether good cause exists for waiver of its rules,<sup>14</sup> the Commission considers whether the particular facts make strict compliance inconsistent with the public interest.<sup>15</sup> The Commission may also take into account concerns of hardship, equity, or more effective implementation of policy on an individual basis.<sup>16</sup> Waiver of the Commission's rules is therefore only appropriate if special circumstances warrant a deviation from the general rule, and such deviation will serve the public interest.<sup>17</sup> The Bureau finds good cause to act on delegated authority to waive the Lifeline rules as described herein, as further discussed below.<sup>18</sup>

7. Careful consideration of how to continue to support a stable and robust affordable communications market through the Lifeline program led to our decision to issue this waiver. This waiver pauses changes to the minimum service standards and voice support phase-out as the Commission develops and analyzes the record in the *2026 Lifeline NPRM*. By maintaining the current Lifeline program minimum service standards and support for voice-only service while these programmatic changes are under consideration, this Order prevents potential excessive provider obligations, subscriber confusion, and loss of service that could accompany multiple changes to the minimum services standards in a short period. For these reasons, we find good cause to pause the Lifeline minimum service standards for broadband and the phase-out in Lifeline support for voice-only services.

### IV. ORDERING CLAUSES

8. ACCORDINGLY, IT IS ORDERED, pursuant to the authority contained in sections 1–4 and 254 of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended, 47 U.S.C. §§ 151–154 and 254, and sections 0.91, 0.291, and 1.3 of the Commission's rules, 47 CFR §§ 0.91, 0.291, and 1.3, that 47 CFR § 54.401(b), 47 CFR § 54.403(a)(2), 47 CFR § 54.408(b)(2)(ii)(D), and 47 CFR § 54.408(c) of the Commission's rules ARE WAIVED to the limited extent provided herein.

9. IT IS FURTHER ORDERED, that pursuant to section 1.102(b)(1) of the Commission's rules, 47 CFR § 1.102(b)(1), this Order SHALL BE EFFECTIVE upon release.

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

Joseph S. Calascione  
Chief  
Wireline Competition Bureau

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<sup>14</sup> See 47 CFR § 1.3.

<sup>15</sup> *Northeast Cellular Telephone Co. v. FCC*, 897 F.2d 1164, 1166 (D.C. Cir. 1990).

<sup>16</sup> *WAIT Radio v. FCC*, 418 F.2d 1153, 1159 (D.C. Cir. 1969); *Northeast Cellular*, 897 F.2d at 1166.

<sup>17</sup> *Northeast Cellular*, 897 F.2d at 1166.

<sup>18</sup> See 47 CFR § 0.291; *2016 Lifeline Order*, 31 FCC Rcd at 4120, para. 433.