

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 26, 2012

WCB
USF-ICC
0447

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

Dear Chairman Genachowski:

I am writing to commend you on the Commission's recent adoption of rules to modernize the federal Lifeline program and to request a modification in the final order.

The Lifeline program has historically made access to the public telecommunications networks affordable for our neediest citizens. The ability to access healthcare providers, potential and current employers, police and other emergency services and to contact and be contacted by family and friends is critically important to all citizens, particularly those of modest means.

I applaud the many important reforms to the Lifeline program you have approved, including the changes that will enable participating carriers to identify and prevent waste, fraud, and abuse of limited Universal Service Fund resources. The revised verification requirements, non-usage de-enrollment rules, and the establishment of data bases to detect and prevent duplicate Lifeline enrollment will ensure that only qualified persons receive Lifeline benefits to which they are entitled and will protect the resources of the Fund.

There is, however, one reform that I am asking the FCC to reconsider and modify. I am concerned about the requirement that applicants for Lifeline service produce documentation of their enrollment in Lifeline-qualifying programs such as Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program, or the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program if they reside in states which do not yet allow Lifeline providers to access state program databases. I realize that some states already allow access to such databases and that the Commission is proposing that a national eligibility database be available by year end 2013. However, for the next one to two years, many eligible low income consumers will be unable to enroll in Lifeline as a result of this proposed requirement.

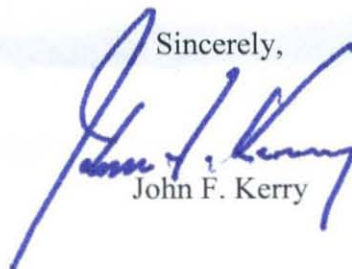
Massachusetts does not currently require consumers to produce such documentation. However, I understand that in the several states which do require such documentation to be provided, far fewer *qualified* needy households enroll in Lifeline than in other states. This is understandable and not surprising. Not only is such documentation often not readily available, even where the documents are in the possession of the Lifeline applicant, without access to copy machines, fax machines, scanners, and Internet access computers, there is no practical way to submit the documentation.

The Honorable Julius Genachowski
March 26, 2012
Page 2

With a real solution -- a national eligibility database -- on the horizon, I urge you to postpone implementation of this burdensome requirement for at least one year so that states and providers can work together to enter into arrangements to enable the providers to use state data bases for the limited purpose of determining consumers' eligibility for Lifeline support going forward.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John F. Kerry", is written over the printed name. The signature is stylized with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

John F. Kerry

Cc: The Honorable Robert McDowell

The Honorable Mignon Clyburn