

DAVID VITTER
LOUISIANA

DEPUTY WHIP

Environment and Public Works
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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 24, 2014

WASHINGTON, D.C.
HART SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
SUITE SH-516
WASHINGTON, DC 20510
(202) 224-4623
FAX: (202) 228-5081

BATON ROUGE
858 CONVENTION STREET
BATON ROUGE, LA 70802
(225) 383-0331
FAX: (225) 383-0952

Website with E-Mail Access:
vitter.senate.gov

The Honorable Tom Wheeler
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

1130

Chairman Wheeler:

The recent testimony by Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Inspector General David Hunt before the U.S. House Subcommittee on Communications and Technology regarding your decision to hamper investigations is alarming. According to the Office of the Inspector General (OIG), you have denied them authority to hire criminal investigators. That needs an immediate explanation. Considering the highly publicized fraud that permeates the FCC, especially within the highly controversial Universal Service Fund (USF) Lifeline program, it makes absolutely no sense to me why you would deny Mr. Hunt's request to hire criminal investigators.

The Lifeline program is one of the most abused and fraud-ridden federal programs ever, and it is our responsibility to work together to eliminate the fraud and abuse. Mr. Hunt's testimony revealed major cause for concern regarding your efforts to eradicate the fraud within Lifeline and USF programs. In July 2014, you created a "strike force," and I commend that effort. However, given the massive amount of documented fraud within the Lifeline program, the "strike force" should coordinate with law enforcement and the OIG. It is obvious that you are not using all of the tools at your disposal or even making basic decisions that would allow the "strike force" to eradicate any findings of fraud and prevent cases of future fraud from happening.

While you might claim that the FCC is taking action to address escalating fraud within Lifeline through implementing the "strike force," it is clear that your efforts are neither effective nor comprehensive. It has been two years since the initial push to curb fraud and abuse within Lifeline, but reports keep coming about new, massive cases of fraud. Far more needs to be done. For instance, a recent Washington Examiner report determined that nearly double the number of eligible subscribers have received taxpayer subsidized cell phones from Lifeline in Maryland. The enforcement of the program rules and regulations has not been a priority of the FCC, and that must change immediately. Without enforcement of Lifeline's eligibility rules, fraud will continue to haunt this taxpayer subsidized welfare program for years to come.

At a minimum, you should absolutely allow the OIG to hire criminal investigators. I hope you will reconsider your denial, and start working aggressively to identify waste, fraud and abuse so we can end it.

Sincerely,

David Vitter
U.S. Senator