



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

September 29, 2016

The Honorable Charles W. Boustany
U.S. House of Representatives
1431 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Boustany:

Thank you for your letter requesting the FCC provide temporary and targeted assistance to those households impacted by the August flooding in Louisiana. As you have indicated, many of Louisiana's citizens have been displaced by the floods, while others have lost homes and property and are living in temporary housing or shelters. Like all Americans, the Commission sympathizes greatly with these hardships, and especially to the ability of flood victims to continue to have access to communications.

As with any disaster of this nature, our first priority has been to assess the status of communications networks that are essential for emergency communications, including the public's ability to call 911. We are working with Public Safety Answering Points in the Baton Rouge area to ensure that 911 service continues to be functional for affected citizens. We have also been in touch with communications providers in the region about their restoration and coordination efforts.

We also recognize that for many of Louisiana's citizens and businesses in the affected region, the flooding has caused displacement and loss of homes and property that will take months or longer to recover from. In your letter, you point to a previous FCC initiative when, in the wake of the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina throughout the Gulf Coast, in October 2005, the FCC took the unprecedented step of directing limited, temporary universal service funding to affected citizens in those states to ensure they continue to have access to telecommunications services. Among other changes, the FCC modified the Lifeline and Link Up program to subsidize mobile phones and mobile service for those victims living in temporary shelters or seeking interim housing who may have been without a permanent home for a period of time. Until that time, the Lifeline and Link Up program had focused funding on fixed, wireline telecommunications services (not mobile) and did not provide any funds for equipment. The FCC, however, recognized the benefit to those affected citizens of having mobile service at a time when housing and wireline communications were uncertain, and temporarily broadened the Lifeline and Link Up program to accommodate the needs of these people, especially via mobile phones.

Today, thanks in part to the lessons of the FCC's 2005 decision, the Lifeline program supports—and has supported since 2008—mobile wireless service for qualifying households.¹ This year we extended the program to support Internet access. Consequently, qualifying households affected by the recent Louisiana flooding are already able to enroll in the Lifeline program to ensure they stay connected online and can continue to communicate with family members, employers, schools, health care providers, and anyone else who may be able to help with housing and other quality of life issues.

Since Hurricane Katrina, our country has experienced a number of other natural events that caused tremendous damage to homes, schools, and businesses, and caused numerous individuals to seek temporary housing. These events occurred not only in Louisiana and along the Gulf Coast, but also in areas like New York and New Jersey, when Superstorm Sandy struck in 2012, or the Midwestern floods in 2008 that devastated several states, including Iowa, Missouri, and Illinois. In fact, just this year, we have seen flooding and serious damage in Oklahoma, Texas, West Virginia, and Maryland. At no time, however, did these events necessitate changes to the Lifeline rules, in part because our rules now afford eligible households the option of applying support towards the cost of mobile wireless voice service.

As you know, the Lifeline program has come under scrutiny in recent years as a result of allegations of waste, fraud, and abuse. The FCC has made significant strides in rooting out problems, including changing eligibility and documentation necessary for enrollment, building systems to eliminate duplication of support, removing from the program consumers who do not use the service, and taking strong enforcement action when warranted by the facts. In particular, our pursuit of waste, fraud, and abuse is why each application goes through a rigorous review process before a Lifeline benefit is approved. Initially an identity verification process is conducted, after which the application is checked for duplication on a real-time and nationwide basis to determine if the consumer is already receiving a Lifeline program-supported service.

Introducing a new, temporary funding element to the Lifeline program could lead to unforeseeable waste or abuse of the program. In your letter, you recognize this concern when you ask that we target individuals with legitimate needs. Currently a household may establish eligibility for Lifeline through participation in a qualifying program or by demonstrating income level. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Medicaid, and Federal Public Housing Assistance are some of the programs applicants utilize to participate in the program, and soon participation in the means-tested Veterans Affairs Pension Fund will also qualify a household. Consumers are also eligible for the Lifeline program if their income is at or below 135 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines. While an individual residing in a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) group site or participating in the Multi-Family Lease and Repair Program does not by itself make that

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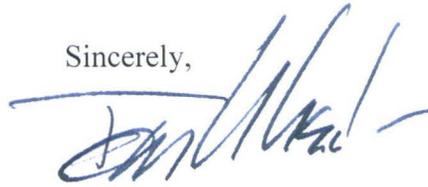
household eligible for Lifeline, they will be eligible if they participate in any of the enumerated eligibility programs or if their income is at or below the 135 percent threshold.

In addition to the service made available through the Lifeline program, it is also worth noting that several wireless providers have offered help during this time of need. Specifically, several providers have offered credits or free service to affected customers, and/or have suspended collections for affected subscribers during this period.² Given that mobile phones function as literal lifelines for so many people during disasters, this good-faith cooperation among wireless providers is encouraging.

Your letter also suggests that the FCC might craft a solution that can sustain services to those affected by the recent floods by funding community Wi-Fi at the temporary housing locations. The Lifeline program in operation today provides essential communications services for targeted households along with vastly improved accountability, which is, I believe, even better than temporary Wi-Fi since it is already in place, functioning, and more widely accessible than a limited number of Wi-Fi hot spots.

Please do not hesitate to contact me for any additional information. For time-critical requests, the Commission's 24/7 operations center can be reached at (202) 418-1122 or FCCOPS@fcc.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom Wheeler", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Tom Wheeler

² See, e.g., Verizon, <https://www.verizonwireless.com/featured/relief/>; AT&T, "Relief for AT&T Customers Impacted by Louisiana Floods" (Aug. 20, 2016), http://about.att.com/newsroom/network_disaster_recovery_louisiana.html.



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

September 29, 2016

The Honorable Bill Cassidy
United States Senate
703 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Cassidy:

Thank you for your letter requesting the FCC provide temporary and targeted assistance to those households impacted by the August flooding in Louisiana. As you have indicated, many of Louisiana's citizens have been displaced by the floods, while others have lost homes and property and are living in temporary housing or shelters. Like all Americans, the Commission sympathizes greatly with these hardships, and especially to the ability of flood victims to continue to have access to communications.

As with any disaster of this nature, our first priority has been to assess the status of communications networks that are essential for emergency communications, including the public's ability to call 911. We are working with Public Safety Answering Points in the Baton Rouge area to ensure that 911 service continues to be functional for affected citizens. We have also been in touch with communications providers in the region about their restoration and coordination efforts.

We also recognize that for many of Louisiana's citizens and businesses in the affected region, the flooding has caused displacement and loss of homes and property that will take months or longer to recover from. In your letter, you point to a previous FCC initiative when, in the wake of the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina throughout the Gulf Coast, in October 2005, the FCC took the unprecedented step of directing limited, temporary universal service funding to affected citizens in those states to ensure they continue to have access to telecommunications services. Among other changes, the FCC modified the Lifeline and Link Up program to subsidize mobile phones and mobile service for those victims living in temporary shelters or seeking interim housing who may have been without a permanent home for a period of time. Until that time, the Lifeline and Link Up program had focused funding on fixed, wireline telecommunications services (not mobile) and did not provide any funds for equipment. The FCC, however, recognized the benefit to those affected citizens of having mobile service at a time when housing and wireline communications were uncertain, and temporarily broadened the Lifeline and Link Up program to accommodate the needs of these people, especially via mobile phones.

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Since Hurricane Katrina, our country has experienced a number of other natural events that caused tremendous damage to homes, schools, and businesses, and caused numerous individuals to seek temporary housing. These events occurred not only in Louisiana and along the Gulf Coast, but also in areas like New York and New Jersey, when Superstorm Sandy struck in 2012, or the Midwestern floods in 2008 that devastated several states, including Iowa, Missouri, and Illinois. In fact, just this year, we have seen flooding and serious damage in Oklahoma, Texas, West Virginia, and Maryland. At no time, however, did these events necessitate changes to the Lifeline rules, in part because our rules now afford eligible households the option of applying support towards the cost of mobile wireless voice service.

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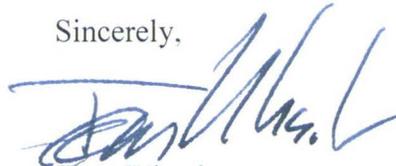
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Your letter also suggests that the FCC might craft a solution that can sustain services to those affected by the recent floods by funding community Wi-Fi at the temporary housing locations. The Lifeline program in operation today provides essential communications services for targeted households along with vastly improved accountability, which is, I believe, even better than temporary Wi-Fi since it is already in place, functioning, and more widely accessible than a limited number of Wi-Fi hot spots.

Please do not hesitate to contact me for any additional information. For time-critical requests, the Commission's 24/7 operations center can be reached at (202) 418-1122 or FCCOPS@fcc.gov.

Sincerely,



Tom Wheeler

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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
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September 29, 2016

The Honorable Cedric L. Richmond
U.S. House of Representatives
240 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Richmond:

Thank you for your letter requesting the FCC provide temporary and targeted assistance to those households impacted by the August flooding in Louisiana. As you have indicated, many of Louisiana's citizens have been displaced by the floods, while others have lost homes and property and are living in temporary housing or shelters. Like all Americans, the Commission sympathizes greatly with these hardships, and especially to the ability of flood victims to continue to have access to communications.

As with any disaster of this nature, our first priority has been to assess the status of communications networks that are essential for emergency communications, including the public's ability to call 911. We are working with Public Safety Answering Points in the Baton Rouge area to ensure that 911 service continues to be functional for affected citizens. We have also been in touch with communications providers in the region about their restoration and coordination efforts.

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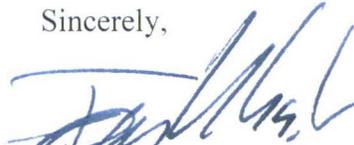
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September 29, 2016

The Honorable David Vitter
United States Senate
516 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Vitter:

Thank you for your letter requesting the FCC provide temporary and targeted assistance to those households impacted by the August flooding in Louisiana. As you have indicated, many of Louisiana's citizens have been displaced by the floods, while others have lost homes and property and are living in temporary housing or shelters. Like all Americans, the Commission sympathizes greatly with these hardships, and especially to the ability of flood victims to continue to have access to communications.

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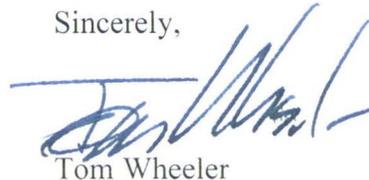
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