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For Immediate Release

STATEMENT OF COMMISSIONER CLYBURN
On the Government Accountability Office's (GAO) Lifeline Report

WASHINGTON, June 29, 2017 – The following statement can be attributed to FCC Commissioner Mignon Clyburn:

“We have a statutory obligation as a Commission to ensure all Americans, including low income consumers and those living in rural and insular areas, have affordable voice and broadband access. Recognition of this responsibility goes hand-in-hand with my long stated belief that we must aggressively root out waste, fraud, and abuse in all of our universal service programs, including Lifeline.

“In recent years, the Commission has taken numerous steps to achieve this goal, including setting up a national eligibility verifier, adopting a periodic recertification requirement and ensuring that people who are signed up are actually using their service. The Lifeline program already has a very low improper payment rate of 0.45%, and it must be noted, that many of the issues highlighted by the GAO’s report will be addressed by the national eligibility verifier. I am pleased that the work on this effort is proceeding as planned, and will work with my colleagues to address all of the GAO’s recommendations.

“Today the FCC’s Lifeline program remains the only means-tested universal service program, where only the consumers who cannot afford to be connected are given the ability to do so. So while we invest in the infrastructure needed to bring connectivity into every community in America, we must not forget that ‘if we build it, they will come’ only holds true if the services are affordable.

“Some may use the limited findings of this report as justification to cut back on the Lifeline program even further, but that would be catastrophic for those most in need. The answer is not denying access to those who cannot afford connectivity and access to critical services like 911, the next steps should include rolling up our sleeves and addressing any imperfections that remain.

“We have a choice to make: be short-sighted and weaken a program designed to assist our nation’s most vulnerable or fix what may be broken so that this agency is actually upholding its Congressional mandate to ‘make available, so far as possible, to all the people of the United

States...a rapid, efficient, Nation-wide, and world-wide wire and radio communication service with adequate facilities at reasonable charges...for the purpose of promoting safety of life and property....’

“Instead of widening the digital divide, let us have an honest conversation about how to make voice and broadband even more affordable and accessible for economically challenged Americans.”

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This is an unofficial announcement of Commission action. Release of the full text of a Commission order constitutes official action. See MCI v. FCC, 515 F.2d 385 (D.C. Cir. 1974).