

November 15, 2017

The Honorable Ajit V. Pai  
Chairman  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12th Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Pai:

We urge the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to halt its effort to cut off support for low-income, tribal families' phone and internet service through its proposed order to change the Tribal Lands Lifeline Program. For nearly two decades the FCC's tribal Lifeline enhancement has helped underserved families in tribal areas afford phone, and more recently, internet service; the FCC is now considering undoing much of that good work. This action would further disconnect tribal areas, widening the digital divide in tribal communities. Even worse, according to the National Congress of American Indians the FCC failed to engage in meaningful consultation with impacted tribes on these proposed changes to the Lifeline program.

The proposed order would discontinue support for Lifeline recipients served by a wireless reseller, reducing access for thousands of tribal families who rely on the program. In the Tribal Lands Lifeline Program, these resellers offer service to 69 percent of general Lifeline recipients and 76 percent of wireless Lifeline recipients. Enacting an order that could affect a significant number of people with wireless service with such short notice could harm thousands of families, and we urge the Commission not to take this action.

The proposed order would also cut off support for tribal families living in urban areas. Congress codified the Lifeline program to serve low-income individuals everywhere, not just in rural areas. Our nation has a trust responsibility to ensure the cultural survival, well-being, and sovereignty of tribes and tribal members. We urge the Commission to rethink its course of action and honor the federal trust responsibility to tribes whether they live in urban or rural areas.

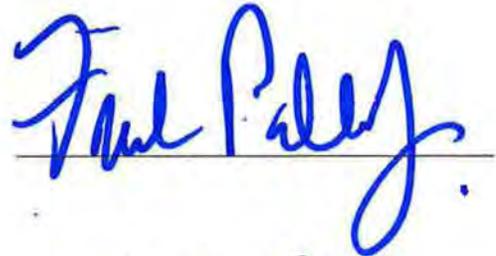
Finally, this order proposes to require an independent certification that individuals utilizing the Tribal Lands Lifeline Program in fact live on tribal land. While it is intended to improve integrity within the program, this proposal could have detrimental unintended consequences. For instance, many tribal residents use descriptive addresses rather than traditional postal addresses, and this order could punish these deserving tribal residents for following their tribal custom. The FCC

has an obligation to find an alternative way to address this issue without risking Lifeline support for underserved, tribal members.

We are disappointed that the Commission has taken the approach of testing dramatic changes to the Lifeline program on tribal members. We urge the Commission to reconsider this policy experiment and engage in meaningful consultation with tribes before cutting off support for individuals on tribal land. I look forward to hearing from your office. Please contact Ross Arnett at (202) 225 – 5330 in my office if you have additional questions.

Sincerely,

  
Raul Ruiz, M.D.  
Member of Congress









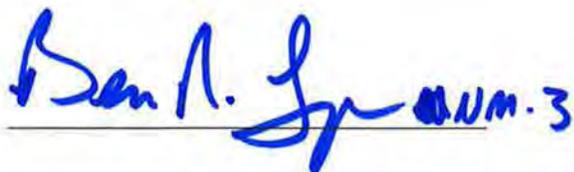


















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