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5TH DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA

COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH

SUBCOMMITTEE ON TAX POLICY



429

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May 31, 2018

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

Dear Chairman Pai:

I urge you to abandon your plan to drastically cut back the congressionally-mandated Lifeline program that has successfully provided phone and internet services when people cannot afford them. I ask that you reconsider your plan to take this critical program away from 8.3 million struggling Americans.

The Lifeline Program is essential for millions of Americans who use their devices to find jobs, to schedule doctor's appointments, to complete their school assignments, to interface with the governments, or to stay in touch with their loved ones. The program helps Americans—including disproportionate numbers of veterans and people of color—help themselves.

The FCC recently proposed to exclude the majority of carriers from participating in the program and to arbitrarily cap the fund. While you have stated that you are aiming to curb waste, fraud, and abuse, experts have repeatedly testified that the sorts of measures you are proposing do not have a successful track record. Instead, these approaches merely force millions of otherwise qualified people to lose service. These measures could be especially brutal during periods of economic downturn when people need the most help.

If you are truly concerned about waste, fraud, and abuse, the Commission should work to accelerate the rollout of the National Verifier that would ensure centralized oversight of the program. Unlike your approach, the National Verifier has received widespread and bipartisan support. In fact, the government Accountability Office has testified that the National Verifier will resolve most issues that may remain with the program without the same brutal side effects on low-income communities. Remarkably, among the comments filed by key stakeholders on the docket, I am not aware of any that fully embrace your proposal, and most urge substantial revision if not outright abandonment of the proceeding.

I therefore ask that you abandon this proceeding cutting the Lifeline program, and instead move forward with a full implementation of the 2016 reforms, including the expedition of the National Verifier. Policymakers at all levels of government are united in their desire to close the digital divide, but the last thing we should be doing is rolling back the policies that have brought connectivity to millions of Americans. This proposal is untimely, counterproductive, and actively undermines our shared goal of connecting everyone.



MIKE THOMPSON
Member of Congress