Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 2, 2018

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

Dear Chairman Pai:

We write in strong support of the Federal Communications Commission's Lifeline program, and to express opposition to your proposal to drastically reduce the program's footprint in Puerto Rico.[1] As you may know from your recent trips to the Island, Lifeline fills a critical gap in Puerto Rico, and given the devastation from Hurricane Maria, this program is now more important than ever.

Nearly half of the residents in Puerto Rico fall under the federal poverty line, and thus, qualify for multiple federal assistance programs. Almost 20 percent of the Island's population has relied on Lifeline in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria for essential communications services.[2] In total, there are roughly 840,000 households in Puerto Rico that are eligible for Lifeline.[3] The program also has a significant footprint within higher-need communities in Puerto Rico, with approximately 264,000 households with children, and approximately 38,000 veterans eligible for Lifeline.[4]

Another important lesson learned from the Hurricane's aftermath is the value of the Lifeline program towards rendering emergency health care treatment. Given the significant damage to Puerto Rico's infrastructure, health care providers had urgent needs for power, medical supplies, communications, and telemedicine support post-landfall. This was necessary to conduct emergency medical response and coordinate care with disaster response operations across the Island.[5] Lifeline was also instrumental in enabling health officials in Puerto Rico to notify and

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[1] "*Fourth Report And Order, Order On Reconsideration, Memorandum Opinion And Order, Notice Of Proposed Rulemaking, And Notice of Inquiry,*" (*Federal Communications Commission*, December 1, 2017), https://apps.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/FCC-17-155A1.pdf.

[2] Nicole Goodkind, "*New FCC Policy Would Be A 'Death Sentence' For Puerto Ricans Recovering From Hurricanes Maria And Irma,*" (*Newsweek*, April 5, 2018), http://www.newsweek.com/puerto-rico-lifeline-poverty-lifeline-fcc-trump-872545.

[3] Mark Pattison, "*Phone, Internet Subsidy May Be Cut,*" (*Catholic News Service*, April 3, 2018), http://www.pittsburghcatholic.org/news/phone-internet-subsidy-may-be-cut-48017979.

[4] *Id.*

[5] "*Amid Greater FCC Investment In Puerto Rico's Hurricane-Damaged Communications Networks, Health Group Focuses On 'Lifeline'-Enabled Crisis Network,*" (*NHIT Collaborative*, Washington DC, March 8, 2018), https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/amid-greater-fcc-investment-in-puerto-ricos-hurricane-damaged-communications-networks-health-group-focuses-on-lifeline-enabled-crisis-network-300611087.html.

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communicate with beneficiaries and other relevant parties.[6] This included sending alerts, tracking patients in "hot spots," and communicating with federal counterparts.[7]

Under your current proposal, it is estimated that 75 percent of existing Lifeline customers in Puerto Rico would lose their telecommunications carrier.[8] After many communities endured widespread lack of communications post-Maria, they should not be forced to endure additional hardship. Continued, reliable access is essential for the Island's economy to recover and to help stop the outmigration of the Island's residents. In addition, hurricane season starts June 1st, and we must make sure more residents – not fewer – have access to life-saving telecommunications services.

For these reasons, we request that you abandon your proposals to gut the Lifeline program. Doing so would help stabilize the Island, while ensuring that its residents, emergency personnel, and health care providers have access to telecommunications services. Thank you for your attention to Puerto Rico and I look forward to working with you on this and other matters of importance for the Island.

Sincerely,

Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator

Sanford D. Bishop, Jr.
Member of Congress

Brendan F. Boyle
Member of Congress

Robert A. Brady
Member of Congress

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[6] *Id.*
[7] *Id.*
[8] *Id.*

David N. Cicilline
Member of Congress

Yvette D. Clarke
Member of Congress

Jim Costa
Member of Congress

John K. Delaney
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Rosa L. DeLauro
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Colleen Hanabusa
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Sheila Jackson Lee
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Betty McCollum
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James P. McGovern
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Jerry McNerney
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