

March 29, 2018

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

Dear Chairman Pai,

We write to express our opposition to your proposal to drastically cut the critical Lifeline program that has successfully provided phone and internet services to individuals who might otherwise not be able to access them. We ask that you reconsider your plan to deprive critical Lifeline support from 8 million otherwise eligible Americans.

It is your obligation to the American public, as the Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, to improve the Lifeline program and ensure that more Americans can afford access, and have means of access, to broadband and phone service. Your proposal accomplishes the exact opposite – it takes resources out of the hands of the most vulnerable Americans.

The Lifeline Program is essential for millions of Americans who rely on subsidized internet access to find jobs, schedule doctor's appointments, complete their school assignments, interface with the government, and remain connected in a digital economy. The program helps Americans—including disproportionate numbers of families with children, veterans and people of color—survive.

The majority of Lifeline's recipients, at least 6.5 million Americans, use the program to receive internet service. From an economic standpoint, it is unclear why the FCC would spend billions of dollars to expand access to broadband while at the same time make Lifeline less accessible to those who need it most. Your proposal impacts over 70 percent of current Lifeline-recipient households by eliminating their wireless providers from the program, leaving less affordable and fewer Lifeline options, while making it more difficult for the companies trying to serve Lifeline customers. Instead of cutting the program, we should ensure Lifeline reaches more Americans in need of access to communication services.

The last thing we should be doing is rolling back the policies that have brought connectivity to millions of Americans. We are requesting responses to the following, before the Commission conducts a vote on the future of Lifeline:

1. The December 1, 2017, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) provides no evidence, analysis, or data to support its assumption that the FCC's proposed changes to Lifeline will spur facilities-based broadband deployment and additional affordable services for low-income families. Provide any specific data, analysis, academic studies, economic reports, etc. that you relied on to support this assumption. Explain why the NPRM included no evidence or data to support this assumption.

2. What is the FCC's plan for the millions of Americans that would lose service due to your actions to cut the Lifeline program?
3. How many Americans in total, broken down by state, would lose their current service provider under your proposal? How many Americans would be left without any provider offering Lifeline service?
4. How will you ensure the integrity of the comment record is intact, and that it will be taken into your decision-making process?
5. How does your proposal help to increase the already terrible connectivity situation in Puerto Rico after its devastation by recent hurricanes?
6. How does your proposal ensure connectivity/affect availability of Lifeline for the following groups (please provide current Lifeline participation statistics for each, where available):
 - a) Tribal members
 - b) Rural Americans
 - c) Low-income Americans
 - d) Veterans
 - e) Elderly populations

Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



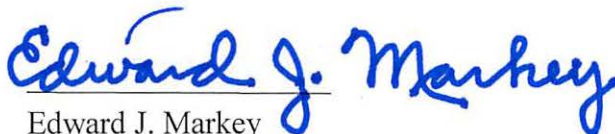
Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



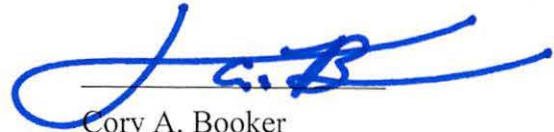
Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator