

July 19, 2018

The Honorable Ajit Pai, Michael O’Rielly, Brendan Carr, & Jessica Rosenworcel
Federal Communication Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Chairman Pai & Members of the Federal Communications Commission,

We write in regard to the Federal Communications Commission’s mission to ensure that communications services, including broadband internet access service, are available to and affordable for all. Universal service has long been the animating goal of all U.S. communications policy, in Congress and at the Commission. The Commission’s universal service programs promote broadband deployment in rural communities; affordable access for low-income families; and connectivity for schools, libraries, and rural health care providers. Each of these programs are critical components of the federal government’s effort to close the digital divide, and the Commission’s focus is rightly placed on updating USF programs for the broadband era.

The Lifeline program was established under President Reagan, and modernized under both Presidents Bush and Obama to better reflect a 21st Century communications marketplace. The program currently supports fixed and mobile voice and broadband services, and provides \$9.25 in monthly assistance to more than 10 million low-income households, including 1.2 million Veterans and 1.4 million seniors, to help them access essential communications services. Lifeline is critical for these families to find and keep jobs, schedule doctor’s appointments, complete homework assignments, and stay in touch with loved ones. Public safety and our economy are improved when everyone has the ability to dial 9-1-1, communicate with an employer, and access education—both children and adults. With over 30 million households qualifying for the Lifeline subsidy, it is critical that the Commission ensure that the Lifeline program remains available to those that need the program.

Since 2012, the Commission has taken numerous steps to safeguard the integrity of the Lifeline program. To that end, we strongly support the FCC’s planned independent third-party national eligibility verification database. This effort will ensure that eligibility is determined according to the Commission’s rules and will prevent ineligible subscribers from enrolling. By relying on existing state databases as a foundation, the verifier will provide maximum effectiveness and accuracy. We understand that six states have begun participating in the independent verifier, and that all states will be participating by the end of 2019. The full implementation of the eligibility verification database is projected to have a large impact on the program’s performance. We urge you to move forward quickly to implement the National Verifier as planned before contemplating further changes to the program.

As the Government Accountability Office testified before the Senate last year, the National Verifier is likely to sufficiently address remaining issues regarding the integrity of the Lifeline

program. While the National Verifier is being implemented, the Commission should not take any further steps that could create uncertainty in the Lifeline program, prevent or disincentivize eligible providers from offering Lifeline-supported service, or take any actions that could have the unintended consequence of making it more difficult for low-income families to obtain affordable communications services.

We have confidence that the Commission will manage the resources of the Lifeline program prudently and effectively. Additionally, we appreciate the FCC's continued transparency by keeping us and the American people apprised of the program's effectiveness in helping to close the digital divide. We look forward to working with you to ensure the success of the Lifeline program.

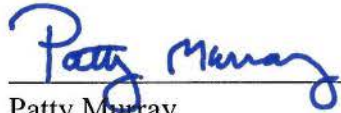
Sincerely



Tom Udall
United States Senator



Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



Patty Murray
United States Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Jack Reed
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator