

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

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FCC Mailroom

May 28, 2019

The Honorable Ajit V. Pai, Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

332

Dear Chairman Pai,

We write to express our serious concerns regarding your proposal to implement an overall cap on the four Universal Service Fund (USF) programs. These programs include the Connect America Fund (formerly known as High-Cost), Rural Health Care, Lifeline, and E-Rate, all of which are important programs that benefit schoolchildren, rural hospitals, and many rural and low-income Americans. It has come to our attention that this proposal has been subject to a vote by the Federal Communications Commission without the benefit of public scrutiny.

In this era of increased reliance on internet connectivity for all aspects of our lives such as applying for benefits, receiving healthcare, securing a loan, completing homework assignments, and applying for jobs, it is imperative that we continue to foster connectivity for all Americans. The USF programs have helped many underserved communities by expanding opportunities to compete in our continually evolving and complex digital world.

The law and the goals of the individual USF programs will not be served if these programs are forced to compete over funding. While we understand that there are existing caps on some programs, a proposal to place an overall budget cap across all four programs could open up a pandora's box of unintended consequences. This would potentially have disastrous effects on these programs and the communities they serve, which makes little sense at a time when there are greater demands for connectivity than ever before.

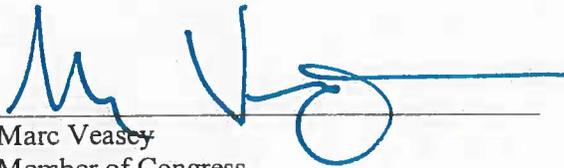
This proposal could hit low-income households, in both urban and rural areas, especially hard. FCC data shows that many low-income Americans struggle to afford basic phone service and internet connectivity. Many of these individuals rely on the Lifeline program for connectivity. Establishing an overall cap for these programs could crowd out funding for the Lifeline program or be used to justify further decreases in funding. This would be poor policy for a program that is already underutilized. Further, this could leave behind the many low-income individuals and people of color that use Lifeline service to complete school assignments, job applications, and compete in our increasingly technology reliant world. Nor does a proposal to cap the program do anything to assist the many homeless LGBTQ youth, who rely on Lifeline to connect with their families, apply for jobs, and find a safe place to live. Without the services provided by the Lifeline program these vulnerable young individuals will have a harder time pulling themselves out

of poverty.¹ It is for these reasons that so many were outspoken against the FCC's 2017 proposed cuts to the Lifeline program.

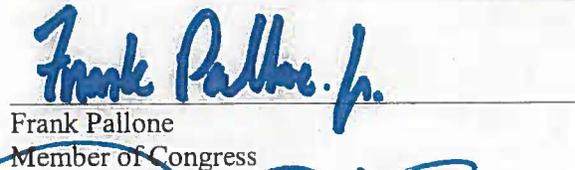
Finally, the proposal that the E-rate and Rural Health Care programs should be under a single sub-cap and forced to compete for funding should be rejected. The E-rate is the only federal source of broadband support connecting our schools and libraries in every congressional district in the nation. A combined cap would force the program that connects our schools and the program that connects our rural hospitals to scrounge over limited funds, creating great uncertainty for schools, libraries, health centers and the providers year to year. A combined cap would also hamstring these anchor institutions from helping close the "homework gap" for students or provide innovative telehealth services to patients. Put simply, combining these programs is flatly inconsistent with the goals and purpose of universal service.

As our reliance on the internet and technology continue to grow, we strongly encourage you to abandon placing an overall cap on the USF or combining any of these crucial programs.

Sincerely,



Marc Veasey
Member of Congress



Frank Pallone
Member of Congress



Bobby L. Rush
Member of Congress



Anna G. Eshoo
Member of Congress



Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress



G. K. Butterfield
Member of Congress



Kathy Castor
Member of Congress

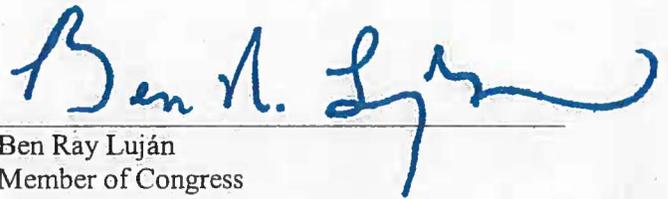


Jerry McNerney
Member of Congress

¹ <https://www.advocate.com/commentary/2018/6/20/discounted-phones-save-lives-homeless-lgbt-teens-now-they-might-be-taken-away>



Peter Welch
Member of Congress



Ben Ray Luján
Member of Congress



Paul Tonko
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Yvette D. Clarke
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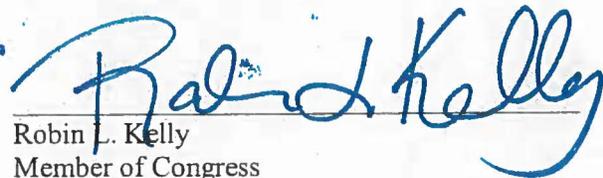
Dave Loebsack
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A. Donald McEachin
Member of Congress