



OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

May 14, 2020

The Honorable Doris Matsui
U.S. House of Representatives
2311 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congresswoman Matsui:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Commission's efforts to keep low-income consumers connected to broadband and phone service during the COVID-19 pandemic. As you know, the Lifeline program plays an important role in ensuring that low-income Americans have access to affordable communications services by providing monthly discounts on broadband and voice services to qualifying consumers. And now more than ever, it is critical that all Americans maintain connectivity so that they can stay in touch with loved ones, telework, participate in telehealth and remote learning, and maintain the social distancing necessary to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

That's why, under my leadership, the FCC has taken aggressive action to help ensure that Lifeline subscribers stay connected during this crisis. For example, in March and April, the FCC's Wireline Competition Bureau temporarily waived several Commission rules that could otherwise result in involuntary removal of subscribers from the Lifeline program during the pandemic. These de-enrollment rules are in place to remove duplicate, unused, and ineligible accounts and ensure that Lifeline program dollars are directed toward qualifying low-income consumers. Lifeline providers are required to de-enroll any subscriber who the carrier has a reasonable basis to believe is no longer eligible for the program. The Bureau found that it was in the public interest to waive these requirements for a limited period of time to ensure that no current Lifeline subscriber loses service during this unprecedented, nationwide public health emergency.

As you note in your letter, we also need to assist Americans who become eligible for Lifeline due to a loss in work or drop in income during the COVID-19 crisis. That's why, on April 29, the Bureau temporarily waived the requirement that consumers seeking to qualify for the program based on their income must provide at least three consecutive months of income documentation. This relief will make it easier for Americans who recently lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic and who qualify for Lifeline to enroll in the program.

The Bureau's Lifeline waivers are in effect until June 30, 2020. Commission staff will monitor the situation and determine whether any additional extensions beyond this date are needed.

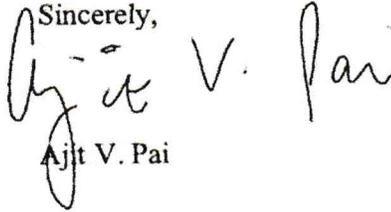
In light of the pandemic, Commission staff and the Universal Service Administrative Company, which administers the Lifeline program, have also increased their efforts to promote

awareness of the program and support other organizations and agencies serving low-income communities. These efforts include distributing materials on how to qualify for and enroll in the Lifeline program to food banks, homeless shelters, and other direct service organizations; providing those materials to state government agencies responsible for administering programs, such as Medicaid and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, through which residents can qualify for Lifeline; conducting consumer advocate webinars to train employees at direct service organizations on how to help consumers apply for and enroll in the Lifeline program; and providing additional access to the Lifeline National Eligibility Verifier for state government agencies seeking to assist consumers with completing their Lifeline applications.

In sum, during this crisis, we are working to keep existing Lifeline subscribers connected, ease burdens on consumers seeking to enroll in the program, and raise awareness of the program among those populations who need it. At the same time, I have called on the broadband and telephone service providers that have signed the FCC's Keep Americans Connected Pledge to go above and beyond the Pledge and expand existing or develop new low-income broadband offerings during COVID-19. I commend the dozens of providers that have heeded this call and made new or improved low-cost offerings available to low-income consumers during the pandemic, and I urge other providers to do the same.

Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ajit V. Pai". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "A" and a long horizontal stroke.

Ajit V. Pai