

March 18, 2020

Ajit Pai
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Pai,

As we come to appreciate the extent to which the coronavirus will impact our schools and business, we must act swiftly to ensure those who need it have access to voice and broadband connections through the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) Lifeline program. I urge you to take immediate steps to provide any Americans that become eligible for Lifeline due to effects of COVID-19 access to the support they need as quickly as possible.

Governor Newsom recently indicated that California schools may stay closed for the remainder of the academic year. While this is a difficult but necessary measure to slow the spread of COVID-19, it will present significant challenges for students, parents, and educators. As we work to facilitate new forms of online and tele-learning, it is crucial that we are taking all necessary steps to prevent students from going without access to a reliable broadband connection while their school is closed. While I appreciate your recent efforts to ensure existing Lifeline subscribers do not see interruptions in service, I believe more must be done.

I was pleased to see that recertification and reverification activity will be put on hold for the immediate future to prevent unnecessary service interruptions for current Lifeline subscribers. However, these steps will not do anything to assist Americans that become eligible for Lifeline or other qualifying assistance programs due to a loss in work or drop in income. The needs of these families cannot be ignored. As containment measures force businesses to suspend operations and schools to close, low income families deserve a reliable broadband connection through which they may participate in a remote classroom, work from home, or apply for new jobs. I urge you to take immediate steps to ease barriers to entry for families that have recently become eligible for the Lifeline program due to the effects of COVID-19.

Specifically, I encourage you to explore measures to grant provisional approvals for Lifeline subscribers as they become eligible directly or via qualifying support programs. Navigating the Lifeline application process for the first time can be confusing and timely. Moreover, waiting for benefits to initiate is a luxury many students and workers cannot afford. To ensure there is service capacity to meet the increase in demand, temporary waivers or modifications to the FCC's current approach to determining Eligible Telecommunications Carrier status may need to be revisited, as has been done in previous emergencies, and the FCC should explore this option immediately. Additionally, I request that the FCC take additional steps to promote awareness of the Lifeline program in coordination with other federal assistance programs so that newly eligible Americans are able to take advantage of this program throughout this public health crisis.

I appreciate your attention to this important matter and look forward to working with you to expand broadband access during this unprecedented public health emergency.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Doris Matsui". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Doris Matsui
Member of Congress