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For Immediate Release

FCC STREAMLINES LIFELINE APPLICATION PROCESS FOR TRIBAL CONSUMERS DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

*Agency Also Extends Previous Lifeline Waivers to August 31
Due to Ongoing Outbreak*

WASHINGTON, June 1, 2020—The Federal Communications Commission today eased the Lifeline program application and enrollment process during the COVID-19 pandemic for low-income consumers living on rural Tribal lands. Specifically, the FCC’s Wireline Competition Bureau issued a temporary waiver to allow Lifeline carriers to begin providing Lifeline service to consumers in rural Tribal areas even if those consumers have not yet submitted certain documentation to complete their application. A carrier that elects to provide service under today’s waiver can claim Lifeline support for service provided during the application process after the subscriber has submitted the necessary documentation and received confirmation of his or her eligibility. The Lifeline program provides qualifying low-income consumers with monthly discounts on broadband and voice services, including a monthly discount of up to \$34.25 for those living on Tribal lands.

“The COVID-19 outbreak has had a severe impact on residents of rural Tribal areas,” said FCC Chairman Ajit Pai. “Low-income consumers in these remote areas may find it difficult to submit the required documentation to enroll in the Lifeline program, and the social distancing required during this pandemic only makes this problem worse. Today’s waiver will give consumers easier, quicker access to the affordable broadband service they need for telehealth, online learning, telework, and communicating with loved ones during the pandemic, and it will give Lifeline carriers the flexibility needed to help these consumers safely complete the application process.”

Under FCC rules, if applicants fail an automated check used to confirm their qualification for the program (e.g., to confirm their identity or eligibility as a low-income consumer), they must provide supporting documentation to complete their application before receiving Lifeline service. Consumers living in rural areas on Tribal lands already face difficulties in providing this documentation, given the need to travel long distances to send mail, lack of electricity, and absence of road infrastructure in some areas. And the challenges brought by the spread of COVID-19 now add to these hardships.

Under today’s waiver, until August 31, 2020, a Lifeline carrier may choose to immediately begin providing Lifeline service to a consumer living in a rural Tribal area who applies for Lifeline but is unable to provide the necessary documentation to resolve a failed automated check at the time of application. The consumer will have 45 days from the time of application to submit the documentation. A Lifeline carrier that chooses to provide service under this waiver may claim that subscriber for reimbursement from the Universal Service Fund after the subscriber has submitted the necessary documentation and received a positive eligibility determination. The carrier may claim Lifeline support for up to 45 days of service provided

prior to the eligibility determination. This approach will help eligible consumers in rural Tribal areas enroll in Lifeline while avoiding in-person contacts at the time of application and quickly get connected to vital broadband and phone services during COVID-19 without creating incentives for Lifeline providers to enroll ineligible subscribers in the program.

In light of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, today's order also extends the Bureau's recent waivers of the Lifeline program's recertification, reverification, general de-enrollment, usage, and income documentation requirements through August 31, 2020. This extension will help ensure that no existing Lifeline subscribers are involuntarily removed from the program during the waiver period.

The order is available online at <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DA-20-577A1.pdf>. For updates on the FCC's wide array of actions to keep Americans connected during the coronavirus pandemic, visit <https://www.fcc.gov/coronavirus>. For more information on Chairman Pai's Keep Americans Connected Pledge, visit <https://www.fcc.gov/keep-americans-connected>.

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