



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF  
THE CHAIRMAN

September 10, 2020

The Honorable Mike Quigley  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2458 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Quigley:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Commission's efforts to keep Americans connected in this unprecedented time. I agree with you that 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. As you note, 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.

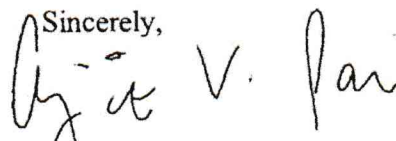
That's why, under my leadership, the Commission has also taken repeated action to ensure the Lifeline program is as available as possible to aid low-income American families and veterans impacted by the pandemic. Beginning in March, the Commission waived several rules to increase flexibility in the enrollment process. These changes continue to facilitate access to Lifeline for low-income Americans who lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic, enable applicants residing in Tribal lands to begin receiving service while they complete the application process, and ensure that no current Lifeline subscriber involuntarily loses service during this unprecedented, nationwide public health emergency. In light of the ongoing pandemic, Commission staff have recently extended these waivers until November 30, 2020. In addition to these waivers, the Commission has partnered with the Department of Health and Human Services (including the Administration for Children and Families, the Administration for Community Living, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, the Health Resources and Services Administration, the Indian Health Service, the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration), the Department of Veterans Affairs (including the Veterans Health Administration's Homeless Programs Office and Office of Connected Care), the Department of Housing and Urban Development (including the Office of Field Policy and Management, the Office of Housing, and the Office of Public and Indian Housing), the Department of Agriculture, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Social Security Administration, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, the National Institute for Children's Health Quality, and the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners to promote Lifeline awareness during the pandemic to ensure that consumers who are newly eligible for the program have the information and resources they need to apply.

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. Although the Pledge has expired, as you know, I urged broadband and telephone providers to continue to take steps to ensure consumers stay connected and to not disconnect those who have fallen behind on their bills, but instead to offer payment plans and deferred payment arrangements.

To be clear, I agree that more can be done. But with the tax that funds our universal service programs at an all-time high, major new funding initiatives must come from Congress. That's why I have repeatedly called on Congress to establish a Remote Learning Initiative and ensure that every student in this country can access online learning resources as schools are reopening. And that's why I have requested Congress to fund new connectivity programs for individuals and families experiencing economic hardship as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Broadband Connectivity and Digital Equity Framework proposed by Chairman Roger Wicker of the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the U.S. Senate and Ranking Member Greg Walden of the Committee on Energy and Commerce of the U.S. House of Representatives is a forward-thinking proposal to do just that. I urge members to find common ground on broadband funding and other core national priorities and avoid tangential issues that have been stalling progress. We stand ready to work with Congress in this area should there be interest in practical solutions to the communications-related challenges posed by the pandemic.

Finally, the Media Bureau rightfully granted an extension of the effective date of Section 642 of the Television Consumer Protection Act. Industry indicated that implementation of the additional disclosure requirements for consumers would have been difficult to achieve by the original June deadline without taking into account the fact that we are in the middle of a pandemic. The Bureau's decision allowed the companies to focus on continuing to provide access to essential services in a time of great need and I expect full compliance once the provisions are effective in December.

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

Sincerely,  
  
Ajit V. Pai