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For Immediate Release**FCC PROPOSES RULES TO HELP DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
SURVIVORS ACCESS SAFE AND AFFORDABLE CONNECTIVITY*****Proposes Significant Steps to Improve Access to Communications Services and
Privacy for Survivors***

WASHINGTON, February 16, 2023—Today the FCC proposed rules to implement key provisions in the Safe Connections Act to support survivors of domestic abuse and other related crimes seeking to maintain critical connections with friends, family, and support networks. These proposed rules would help survivors obtain separate service lines from shared accounts that include their abusers, protect the privacy of calls made by survivors to domestic abuse hotlines, and provide support for survivors who suffer from financial hardship through our affordability programs. Today’s Notice of Proposed Rulemaking builds on the work the Commission initiated in July 2022 to support the connectivity needs of survivors.

Reliable, safe, and affordable connectivity is critical to survivors in or leaving a relationship involving domestic violence, human trafficking, and other related crimes or abuse. This connectivity can assist survivors in leaving their abusers and finding and maintaining contact with family, social safety networks, employers, and support services.

As survivors navigate difficult circumstances, access to communications services is critically important, especially since many survivors may not have direct control over their mobile phone or broadband plans, which may still be managed by their abusers. Survivors whose devices and associated telephone numbers are part of multi-line or shared plans can face difficulties separating lines from such plans and maintaining affordable service as they try to move on with their lives. Despite a need to access federal assistance programs, survivors may be hesitant to pursue these for fear of retaliation. Having access to an independent phone or broadband connection is important for survivors to be able to communicate and access other available services without fear of their communications, location, or other private information being revealed to their abusers.

As part of today’s Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, the FCC seeks comment on proposed rules for the Safe Connections Act’s statutory requirement requiring mobile service providers to separate the line of a survivor of domestic violence (and other related crimes and abuse), and any individuals in the care of the survivor, from a mobile service contract shared with an abuser within two business days after receiving a request from the survivor. To protect the privacy of calls and text messages to hotlines and emergency assistance resources, the Commission also seeks comment on a proposal to require service providers to omit records of calls or text messages to certain hotlines from consumer-facing call and text message logs.

Given the importance of these vital services and survivors' potentially limited or altered income, survivors may be especially in need of support from federal affordability programs. To address this need, today's action seeks comment on designating the Lifeline program, or, in the alternative, the Affordable Connectivity Program, as a means for providing eligible survivors suffering financial hardship with emergency communications support for up to six months.

Action by the Commission February 16, 2023 by Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (FCC 23-9).
Chairwoman Rosenworcel, Commissioners Carr, Starks, and Simington approving.
Chairwoman Rosenworcel and Commissioner Starks issuing separate statements.

WC Docket Nos. 22-238, 11-42, 21-450

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This is an unofficial announcement of Commission action. Release of the full text of a Commission order constitutes official action. See MCI v. FCC, 515 F.2d 385 (D.C. Cir. 1974).