



## OFFICE OF CHAIRMAN BRENDAN CARR

### **Carr Proposes New Reforms to Ensure that Only Living and Lawful Americans Participate in Federal Lifeline Program**

*Follows New Inspector General Advisory Showing Hundreds of Thousands of Dead People Have Been Used to Claim Millions in Federal Dollars—Every Year—Intended to Subsidize Phone & Internet Services for Low-Income Americans*

WASHINGTON, January 27, 2026—Today, FCC Chairman Brendan Carr announced that the Commission will vote next month on proposals to reform the agency’s federal Lifeline program, which accounts for nearly \$1 billion in spending every year. These proposals are designed to enhance program integrity, prevent fraud, and ensure that federal dollars go only to eligible low-income Americans. The federal Lifeline program provides a discount on phone and Internet services for qualifying low-income Americans, but in recent years rampant abuse of the system has been uncovered, necessitating a closer look at the Commission’s rules.

A new Inspector General Advisory, released just [yesterday](#), shows that Lifeline providers received nearly \$5 million in federal dollars to provide phone or Internet service to hundreds of thousands of dead people. The Advisory, which looked at the three opt-out states, shows that 81% of this fraud took place in California while the state had been allowed to run its own process to verify subscriber eligibility. FCC Chairman Carr recently [revoked](#) California’s ‘opt-out’ status.

#### **Chairman Carr issued the following statement:**

“The FCC has an obligation to be a good steward of federal dollars. And that is why the agency will be taking a comprehensive look at the FCC’s nearly \$1 billion dollar a year Lifeline program, which subsidizes phone and Internet services for low-income Americans. It should go without saying that only beneficiaries that are both living and here legally should qualify for benefits under this program. But the data to date shows that this is not the case.

“A recent Inspector General Advisory shows that Lifeline providers received nearly \$5 million in federal dollars to provide phone or Internet service to more than 116,000 dead people in the three opt-out states. Over 80% of those scams took place in California alone. That type of waste, fraud, and abuse is completely unacceptable.

“Similarly, FCC regulations do not adequately ensure that these federal dollars flow only to people that are here lawfully. There has been a recent rise in non-citizens fraudulently obtaining social security numbers. And the current verification process does not do a good enough job at preventing duplicative subscriptions and similar abuse.

“So the FCC will be voting on a plan to address all of these issues. Your hard-earned dollars should only be going to those households that Congress intended to benefit.”

## **Additional Background Information:**

Congress and the FCC established the federal Lifeline program to help ensure that low-income Americans are able to receive affordable communications service. Participating companies may claim Lifeline support for voice and broadband services for eligible subscribers, paid for out of the federal Universal Service Fund.

Over the years, the Commission has taken critical steps to protect program integrity.

In 2012, the Commission established the National Lifeline Accountability Database (NLAD) to prevent and detect duplicative Lifeline support provided to individuals and households.

In 2016, the Commission established the National Lifeline Eligibility Verifier, to improve the accuracy of eligibility verifications of Lifeline applicants. A Lifeline applicant currently must provide on their application form their full name; residential address; whether they live at the residential address on a temporary or permanent basis; billing address; date of birth; and either the last four digits of their Social Security number (SSN) or Tribal identification number. This is a requirement designed to operate in a manner that limits the program to U.S. citizens and qualified persons that have lawfully valid SSNs. However, there has been an increase in the number of SSNs illegally obtained or assigned in recent years, with more than 2 million non-citizens illegally assigned SSNs in 2024 alone. The FCC is following this issue closely to ensure all states are following the appropriate procedures.

In November 2025, the FCC revoked California's 'opt-out' status and now requires federal Lifeline applicants in California to comply with the federal verification process that applies in nearly every other state. The recent Inspector General Advisory bolsters this decision as it shows California enrolled many deceased individuals into the Lifeline program using its own eligibility standards.

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) is an important safeguard that protects federal funding by limiting support for federal programs to qualified persons. The FCC will be seeking comment on a tentative conclusion that Lifeline program support is a "federal public benefit" and is therefore available only to U.S. citizens and persons with appropriate qualified status under the PRWORA.

Additionally, the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, which will be voted on by the full Commission during the February 18th Open Meeting, proposes program reforms to ensure the program helps the people it is intended to benefit. Consistent with the goal of ensuring taxpayer-funded benefits are provided only to eligible recipients, if adopted, the FCC would seek comment on several steps to safeguard the Lifeline program including:

- Ensuring that Lifeline support is used to benefit only legal, living, and eligible Americans consistent with section 254 of the Act, through enhanced requirements to ensure that program participants are truly eligible for Lifeline discounts;
- Improving program integrity and efficiency, including reforms applicable to the states that have been permitted to opt out of using the NLAD;
- Promoting more principled service provider conduct and ensuring that service providers that participate in the Lifeline program comply with all rules; and
- Streamlining Lifeline program rules and minimizing stakeholder confusion.

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