



FCC Proposes Accountability Reforms to Lifeline Program

Proposal Outlines Steps the Agency Could Take to Ensure that Only Living and Lawful Americans Participate in the Program

WASHINGTON, February 18, 2026—Today, the Federal Communications Commission adopted a proposal to reform the agency’s federal Lifeline program, which accounts for nearly \$1 billion in spending every year. Through today’s Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, the FCC seeks comment on program reforms that are designed to ensure that the Lifeline program is efficient, transparent, and accountable—while continuing to support Americans who rely on it.

The federal Lifeline program plays a critical role in helping eligible low-income Americans stay connected through discounts on phone and Internet services. Participating companies may claim Lifeline support for voice and broadband services for [eligible](#) subscribers, paid for out of the federal Universal Service Fund. However, in recent years, rampant abuse of the program and its verification processes has been uncovered, necessitating a closer look at the Commission’s rules to ensure that federal dollars are only flowing to people that are both here legally and lawfully qualified to receive these federal benefits.

The Notice of Proposed Rulemaking 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, the FCC will seek comment on several steps to safeguard the Lifeline program including:

- Proposing 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 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996;
- Ensuring that Lifeline support is used to benefit only legal, living, and eligible Americans consistent with section 254 of the Act, through enhanced requirements that ensure 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 the program integrity verifications conducted by the Universal Service Administrative Company and instead perform their own verifications;
- 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.

Action by the Commission February 18, 2026 by Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (FCC 26-8). Chairman Carr and Commissioner Trusty approving. Commissioner Gomez dissenting in part and concurring in part. Chairman Carr, Commissioners Gomez and Trusty issuing separate statements.

WC Docket Nos. 11-42,17-287, 09-197, 21-450, 20-445

###

**Media Contact: MediaRelations@fcc.gov / (202) 418-0500
[@FCC / www.fcc.gov](https://www.fcc.gov)**

