

**STATEMENT OF
CHAIRMAN BRENDAN CARR**

Re: *Lifeline and Link Up Reform and Modernization; Bridging the Digital Divide for Low-Income Consumers; Telecommunications Carriers Eligible for Universal Service Support; Affordable Connectivity Program; Emergency Broadband Benefit Program*, WC Docket Nos. 11-42, 17-287, 09-197, 21-450, 20-445, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (February 18, 2026).

Each year, Americans contribute more than \$8 billion to support the FCC's Universal Service Programs, including Lifeline. And Lifeline alone is a nearly \$1 billion-per-year program that helps low-income Americans afford basic phone and Internet services. With this amount of funding comes an equally large responsibility. The FCC must be a good steward of those federal dollars and a vigilant administrator of its USF programs.

However, a recent Inspector General advisory identified serious integrity issues in the Lifeline program, including benefits being claimed for dead people and others who are not lawfully eligible under federal law. In just three "opt-out" states alone—states where the National Verifier was not used for eligibility—the Inspector General found that nearly \$5 million in federal dollars went to provide phone or Internet service to more than 116,000 dead people. Over 80% of those scams took place in California alone.

My position on this is clear. To receive federal subsidies like Lifeline, you must be a living and lawful beneficiary. The government should not be spending the money of hardworking Americans to provide phone and Internet service to dead people. While some have tried to dismiss these findings as an unfortunate "reality of administering a large public program" where people die, the Inspector General's advisory shows that 40,000 or nearly 35% of the relevant people died or may have died before enrollment. And as of February 1, nearly 9,000 of them were still receiving subsidies despite having died at some point between 2020 and September 2025. I am happy to report that as of today, every one of the deceased individuals identified by the Inspector General is being de-enrolled from the program.

This failure in oversight undermines both taxpayer confidence and the program's ability to serve the low-income Americans that actually need the services. That is why I am advancing reforms to ensure that only living, lawfully eligible individuals participate in the Lifeline program, consistent with federal law. If adopted, these program changes would strengthen eligibility verification, close loopholes identified by the Inspector General, and restore confidence in Lifeline.

I would like to thank Mike Alonso, Bryan Boyle, Denise Golumbaski, Sam Lewis, Ashley Tyson, Eric Wu, Cara Voth, Malena Barzilai, Joseph Calascione, Andrea Kelly, and Steve Fecarotta at the FCC for their hard work on this item and the Inspector General for continuing to uncover fraud and help us safeguard our programs.