

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER JONATHAN S. ADELSTEIN**

I am pleased to support this Order because it strengthens and enhances the Commission's Lifeline and Link-Up programs. Together, the Lifeline and Link-Up programs form the backbone of our efforts to promote universal telephone service for low-income consumers. By providing discounts on telephone installation and monthly telephone service to low-income consumers, the Lifeline and Link-Up programs have been instrumental in helping us achieve extraordinarily high levels of telephone penetration in the U.S. Overall, more than 95 percent of households in the U.S. have telephone service.

Indeed, for most of us, living without telephone service is almost unimaginable. Telephone service is considered a necessity for daily modern life. It is a link to our jobs, to commerce, to healthcare and emergency services, not to mention friends and family. Increasingly, telephone service is a baseline, upon which we are building a national communications infrastructure capable of supporting services that are transforming our economy and way of life.

Despite our progress, consumers in over 5 million U.S. households lack even the most basic connectivity. For many of these consumers, the cost of activating and maintaining telephone service is prohibitively expensive, keeping even the most basic connections out of reach. This is particularly so for low income consumers, who are much less likely to have access to telephone service. So, I am pleased that this order strikes at that gap by introducing for the first time federal income-based criteria for the Lifeline and Link-Up programs. This Order recognizes that poverty rates are increasing, while participation in many public assistance programs is decreasing. I hope that the income-based criteria that we adopt in this Order will allow our valuable programs to reach more of the consumers who truly need this assistance, and I look forward to exploring the broader criteria proposed in the attached Notice.

I am also pleased that this Order encourages states and carriers to do more to increase participation by eligible consumers. With less than half of all eligible households participating in these programs, it appears that many low income consumers are unaware that assistance is available to them. One significant step in this Order is the conclusion that we must do more to reach out to non-English speaking consumers. Through this approach, we recognize and foster the diversity of our communities.

I would like to thank the members of the Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service for their contributions on this issue. Their recommendations form the basis for this decision. I would also like to recognize our colleagues in the state public utility commissions who continue to work hard to implement these programs as efficiently and effectively as possible. All of us benefit from their efforts and success.