

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER OLIVIA TRUSTY**

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).

“Quality services should be available at just, reasonable, and affordable rates.” That is the first principle Congress gave the FCC to guide universal service policy.

Since its creation in the mid-1980s, the Lifeline program has played an important role in the Commission’s efforts to fulfill its statutory mission: to make communications services available to all Americans. Lifeline has enabled countless households to afford the communications services necessary to participate in modern life, but the program has faced persistent fraud, waste, and abuse challenges. Improper Lifeline payments ultimately diminish the program’s effectiveness and jeopardize the Commission’s ability to expand connectivity benefits to eligible individuals and families.

Notwithstanding these issues, affordability continues to be a central component of the universal service fund. As we look ahead, one important step to address shortcomings in current verification processes, is ensuring that the FCC complies with federal laws governing publicly-funded benefits. The public should not be asked to support benefits provided in violation of federal statutes. Last year, President Trump called on agencies to ensure compliance with the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, and this Notice appropriately seeks comment on how that statute could apply here.

The Notice also invites comment on additional steps to strengthen stewardship of public funds through our Lifeline program, including several recommendations from the FCC’s Office of Inspector General aimed at preventing waste, fraud, and abuse. I welcome stakeholder input, as well, on alternative approaches informed by practical experience with the Lifeline program that could target these objectives more efficiently and effectively.

It has now been 30 years since the 1996 Act directed the FCC to ensure that “[q]uality services should be available at just, reasonable, and affordable rates.” In addition to the actions we are taking today, I look forward to working with Congress through its bipartisan, bicameral USF working group to modernize universal service and promote affordability for the next 30 years and beyond.

I thank the Wireline Competition Bureau for its excellent work on this item.