

June 21, 2016

Dear Representative:

On March 31, 2016, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) voted to modernize Lifeline by allowing the program's modest discount to be used by eligible, low-income individuals to purchase broadband internet access. As a coalition of nearly 40 organizations committed to digital inclusion, we lauded the FCC vote and view the FCC's Lifeline Modernization Order as progress. Unfortunately, some in Congress are attempting to stop this progress in its tracks.

We are troubled to learn of planned legislative attempts to cap the Lifeline program budget and to slash critical services (such as wireless mobile data service). We oppose these and other attacks on Lifeline because they threaten to: deny children the tools to improve their chances to get a good education; compromise individual and public safety; prevent families from escaping the cycle of poverty; and harm the nation's economy.

- Children and Educational Opportunity. At a moment when nearly 70% of teachers assign homework that requires the Internet, children without broadband access at home are left without the ability to do their homework. This "homework gap" threatens to leave low-income children behind, denying them a chance to get a good education. This problem is particularly pronounced in rural areas; in these areas, a child might live countless miles from the nearest library, which often provides the only opportunity to log onto the Internet. The inability to use the Internet to do homework also prevents children from obtaining critical digital proficiency skills, thereby denying the American workforce a set of future workers who are able to compete in today's global marketplace.
- Wireless Service and Safety. Cutting support for wireless service would likely mean that many low-income individuals would not be able to summon medical help in a car accident or to alert first responders to emergencies (such as a fast-moving fire, a flooded road, or a violent attack) that pose a threat to the larger community. This undermines individual safety and the safety of the greater public.
- A Path from Poverty. According to some studies, roughly 30% of people across America lack broadband access connections at home. However, the numbers in those studies are far more grim for certain communities, as 59% of households with annual income below \$20,000, 46% of African American households, 50% of Hispanic households, and 55% of individuals 65 and older lack such broadband access. In an era in which learning skills, applying to schools, and submitting job applications are accomplished via the Internet, the path from poverty is blocked for a large swathe of America that remains unconnected. Indeed, research shows that personal income rises with greater broadband access. 41% of Americans living on Tribal lands (1.6 million people) lack access to 25 Mbps/3 Mbps broadband while 68% living in rural areas of Tribal lands (1.3 million people) lack access.
- The Nation's Economic Health. Broadband penetration is correlated with a nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and research indicates that increasing broadband penetration can stimulate an increase in GDP. The Internet also helps connect consumers to retailers, who

increasingly sell their products online. E-commerce is projected to account for 5.4 percent of our nation's GDP in 2016 and is a growing part of our nation's economy. Compromising a commitment to broadband inclusion is compromising a commitment to our nation's economic recovery and its economic future.

Protecting the Lifeline program should not be a partisan issue. This program began in the Reagan administration, which believed that subsidized telephone service for low-income Americans was essential to full participation in our nation's political, social, and economic life. In the George W. Bush administration, Lifeline was expanded to include wireless phone service. In the Obama administration, including broadband is simply the next logical step in Lifeline modernization and ensures that the program honors its founding purpose --- to provide eligible individuals with access to critical communications tools.

We ask that you oppose any attacks on Lifeline. Leadership from both sides of the aisle created the Lifeline program decades ago and will hopefully preserve it today.

Thank you for your time and consideration. If you have any questions or need any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact Eduardo Soto at esoto@rabengroup.com.

Respectfully,

18 Million Rising
Access Humboldt
American Civil Liberties Union
American Library Association
Appalshop
Benton Foundation
California Telehealth Network
Center for Media Justice
Center for Rural Strategies
ColorOfChange
Common Cause
Common Sense Kids Action
Connect Your Community 2.0
Consumer Federation of America
Consumer Union
Communications Workers of America
Demand Progress
Digital Inclusion Alliance
Free Press Action Fund
Georgetown Law Center
Greenlining Institute
Institute for Local Self Reliance
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
League of United Latin American Citizens
Media Access Project

Media Mobilizing Project
NAACP
National Consumer Law Center
National Council of La Raza
National Digital Inclusion Alliance
National Urban League
Native Public Media
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OCA – Asian Pacific American Advocates
Open Technology Institute
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