

March 28, 2016

The Honorable Thomas Wheeler
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Wheeler,

We commend the recent Federal Communications Commission (FCC) proposal to improve access to broadband for low-income Americans by modernizing the Lifeline program. One of four Universal Service programs, Lifeline was established in 1984 during the Reagan administration to provide support for landline telephone service to low-income families. The program was later updated under President George W. Bush to cover cell phone service. We applaud the Commission for its extensive work to ensure the integrity of this program and tamp down on waste, fraud, and abuse. Now, the time has come to update this program to ensure it keeps pace with the most ubiquitous form of modern communication.

As you know, access to broadband is no longer a luxury. It is a necessity to connect individuals to employment opportunities, to complete an education, and to access important services online. Improving access to broadband, particularly for those with limited financial means, is an important national goal; and leveraging the existing Lifeline program will undoubtedly have a major impact on closing the digital divide for thousands of Americans in our states and across the country. The current proposal is an important step forward and we look forward to the FCC's vote later this month.

The need for more affordable broadband access cannot be overstated. Today, one in three U.S. adults lacks broadband at home, while one in five has neither a home connection nor a smartphone. Yet 80 percent of students report they require the Internet to do their homework and 90 percent of job applications have gone online. We have seen reports from across the country of lower-income students who fall into this so-called "homework gap," huddling outside their public libraries in the evening hoping to pick up a free Wi-Fi signal to complete their homework. As a country, we must do better.

The Lifeline proposal will make critical strides in improving accessibility for these individuals. The proposal preserves consumer choice and sets minimum service levels on supported services, to ensure low-income Americans have access to and can afford voice and broadband services.

We recognize the Commission is still finalizing the details of the modernization proposal. Please take care to ensure that any proposal to decrease over time the support for mobile "voice only" options currently covered by Lifeline undergoes careful review and considers the ongoing affordability of the service, including for those consumers that currently receive the service at no cost. Diminishing support for voice-only offerings may have unintended consequences for vulnerable communities who still rely on such services. We understand that the proposed order includes a requirement that the FCC conduct a thorough review of the Lifeline market during the transition period and trust this further data will be analyzed prior to any final changes to mobile voice support. We welcome news of that review process.

We also recognize that the Commission continues to gather input on potential minimum service standards and other broadband provider eligibility requirements. We trust that the Commission will strike a balance on these questions, striving not only to promote customer choice among new and existing Lifeline

providers, but also to ensure the availability and reliability of such services, including the availability of no-cost-to-consumer options.

Broadband access enables social and economic mobility, and provides expanded opportunities for those who have every desire to work hard and succeed but otherwise lack the information resources to compete. Thank you again for your efforts to advance access to modern communications for all Americans by modernizing the Lifeline program.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



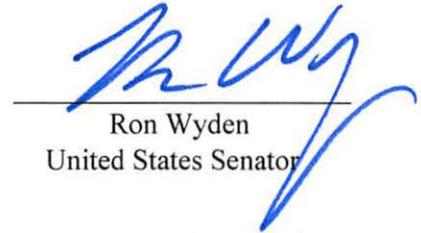
Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



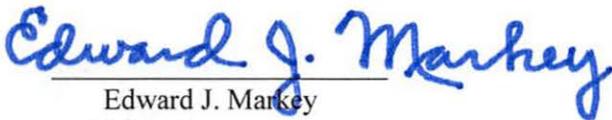
Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator



Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



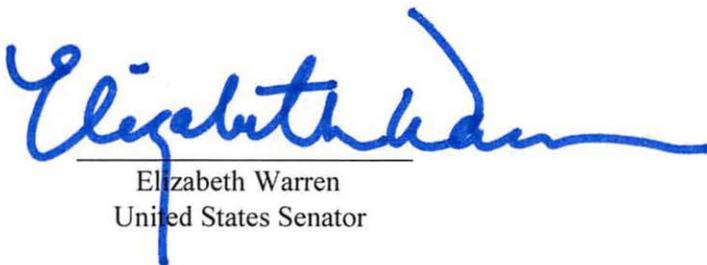
Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



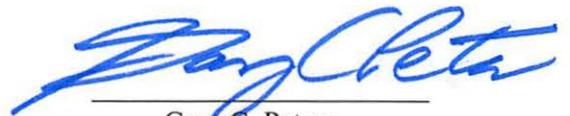
Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



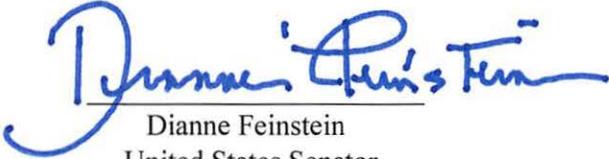
Gary C. Peters
United States Senator



Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



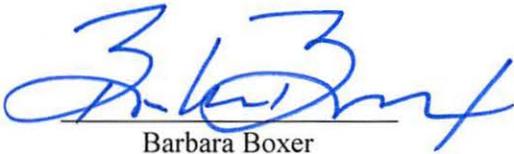
Al Franken
United States Senator



Patty Murray
United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Barbara Boxer
United States Senator

CC: Commissioners Clyburn, Rosenworcel, Pai, O'Rielly