



Federal  
Communications  
Commission

# Bridging the Affordability Gap

[#WeCannotWait](#)

Commissioner Mignon Clyburn  
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# Bridging the Affordability Gap

## #WeCannotWait

We need a new “Lifeline” program for the 21st century. The 30-year-old program falls short of Congress’s directive to ensure that advanced communications services are affordable, fails to provide real consumer choice and does not offer competitive options to meet today’s communications needs.

We must construct a future-proof “technology bridge” that connects, empowers and enables independence.

- **Connectivity** – Out of the digital darkness and into full societal participation.
- **Empowerment** – Technology is the greatest equalizer of our time.
- **Independence** – Broadband is the tool needed to succeed and escape hard times. Our goal should be to put mechanisms in place so that consumers “graduate” from Lifeline and other benefit programs.



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**Financial hardships are real and force consumers to suspend service when connectivity is needed the most.**

- 44% of low-income smartphone owners have to had cancel or suspend their service due to financial constraints.
- For those whose only access to the Internet is their smart phone, 48% have had to cancel or shut off service for a period of time due to financial hardship. (Pew Research Center)



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**Today, for far too many, broadband represents a bridge to nowhere**

- We have made excellent strides in connecting our nation's schools and libraries.
- We have made tremendous gains in broadband deployment.
- But when it comes to our most vulnerable – the disconnected – we have fallen woefully short.

**We are stuck on 30**

- The Lifeline program was established 30 years ago but it only supports voice and has yet to be modernized for the digital age.
- There are hundreds of “persistent poverty” areas in our country where, for 30 years or more, conditions have either not changed or have gotten worse.
- 30% of Americans do not have broadband at home.



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### Did you know that...

- The FCC's 2012 Lifeline reforms closed long-standing loopholes that have saved consumers a whopping \$2.75 billion – exceeding projections by \$750,000,000.

### What is left to do and why?

- Lifeline was created to close the connectivity gap but it needs to be recalibrated for the digital age.
- Citizens are stuck in the digital darkness, without a primary tool needed for seamless health care, educational, civic participation and professional advancement. They should not have to wait.
- A technology driven solution is in plain sight. Our statute demands that we act.

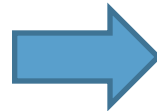


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### 1985-Era Lifeline

- Carrier determines eligibility
- No minimum standards of service
- Voice-only
- Limited choice of providers
- Lifeline operated independent of other subsidy programs
- No metrics to track progress
- \$9.25 subsidy



### 21<sup>st</sup> Century Lifeline

- Neutral party determines program eligibility
- Robust minimum standards
- Extract maximum value with robust voice and broadband offerings
- Broader participation and streamlined process
- Lifeline leverages efficiencies from other programs
- Metrics to track progress
- \$9.25 subsidy



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Questions? Contact Chanelle Hardy ([chanelle.hardy@fcc.gov](mailto:chanelle.hardy@fcc.gov)) or Rebekah Goodheart ([rebekah.goodheart@fcc.gov](mailto:rebekah.goodheart@fcc.gov)) *Photo of the Aiola Bridge, in Austria*