

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 10, 2017

The Honorable Ajit Pai
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Pai:

We write to express how deeply troubled we are that one of your first actions as Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has been to undermine the Lifeline program and make it more difficult for low-income people to access affordable broadband. Lifeline is a critical tool for closing the digital divide – a problem you pledged to prioritize in your first speech to FCC staff as Chairman. Accordingly, we urge you to reverse your decision to abruptly revoke the recognition of nine companies as Lifeline broadband providers (LBP) just weeks after they were approved. This action does nothing but create a chilling effect on potential provider participation, and unfairly punish low-income consumers.

Established during the Reagan Administration and expanded during the Bush Administration, the Lifeline program has helped tens of millions of low-income Americans afford basic phone service including families, U.S. military veterans, and elderly individuals. Last year, the FCC modernized the Lifeline program, rightfully refocusing its support on broadband. There is no question that access to broadband is essential to conduct daily activities, pursue job and housing opportunities, obtain quality health care services, and stay in touch with family members. Furthermore, adding broadband to Lifeline can help end the cruel “homework gap” for the five million out of the 28 million households in this country with school-aged children who lack access to broadband.

We urge you to recognize that your recent decision may have far-reaching impacts beyond just disconnecting the customers of one of the nine providers whose LBP status you have revoked. The nine companies have followed the rules, including the approval process, and committed no fraud nor wrongdoing of any kind. This decision sends a harmful message to businesses who want to be able to provide broadband to our neediest households. Even worse, by deterring other broadband providers from participating in the Lifeline program, this could limit choices for Lifeline consumers and increase the consumer cost of the program. While we support efforts to prevent waste, fraud, and abuse, a drastic decision to withdraw a company’s LBP status ought to be based on actual wrongdoing.

By statute, the FCC has an obligation to ensure “consumers in all regions of the country, including low-income consumers” have access to “advanced telecommunications services.” Expanding broadband adoption by low-income families facilitates education and economic growth, enhances health care delivery, improves public safety and most importantly, it provides a foundation for long-term economic development in communities throughout the United States.

We call on you to reconsider your decision and look forward to hearing from you on this important matter.

Sincerely,



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senate



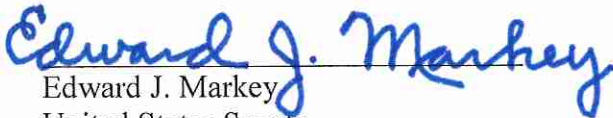
Cory A. Booker
United States Senate



Bernard Sanders
United States Senate



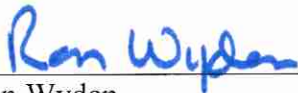
Al Franken
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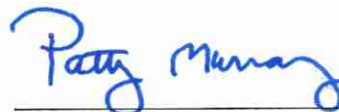
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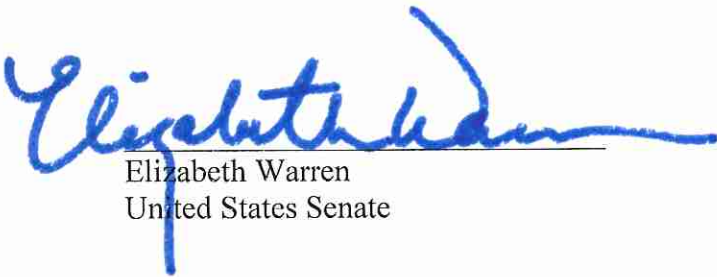
Gary C. Peters
United States Senate



Ron Wyden
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Elizabeth Warren
United States Senate



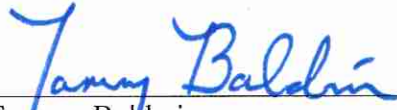
Sherrod Brown
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Kirsten Gillibrand
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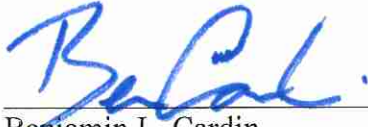
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