

Advocacy Organizations Urge FCC to Step Back From Radical Proposals that Will Jeopardize Affordable Voice and Internet for Millions of Low-Income Veterans, Families with Children, and Older Adults

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: FEBRUARY 21, 2018

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Washington - Today the National Consumer Law Center along with 20 other civil rights and consumer advocacy organizations filed comments with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) urging the Commission to preserve the role of the federal Lifeline program to help low-income households afford modern voice and internet service. "The intent of the Lifeline program is to help low-income households afford essential voice and data service. This package of proposals runs the risk of harming over eight million Lifeline households and millions more eligible veterans, older Americans, and households with school-aged children," **said Olivia Wein, staff attorney with the National Consumer Law Center.**

The FCC is seeking to eliminate the most popular providers of Lifeline service, the wireless resellers who serve around 70 percent of the Lifeline households, simply because these carriers do not own or operate their own infrastructure. "Millions of poor families would lose their Lifeline service provider, with no assurance that there would be another Lifeline service provider to serve them," **said Cheryl Leanza, policy advisor to the United Church of Christ, OC, Inc.,** one of the organizations that have joined in the Low-Income Consumer Advocate filing. Since 1997, the United Church of Christ has formally recognized that we need to ensure we do not become a society divided between "information rich" and "information poor," which leaves struggling people without the tools to succeed in modern society. "The FCC must keep the focus of Lifeline on people," **said Leanza.**

Other dangerous elements in the FCC's proposal include one that would limit Lifeline voice support to rural areas. "Voice service is vital for health and safety, no matter where a consumer lives," **said Wein.** Another proposal takes this very simple \$9.25 month affordability program and adds a complex funding cap that would mean that the benefit amount would have to be recalculated for millions of recipients, possibly mid-year, making it difficult for Lifeline companies and consumers to budget and increasing the chance of consumer confusion and loss of service.

The FCC's Lifeline proposal also seeks comment on whether there should be a lifetime cap on Lifeline service, which would hurt low-income elders in particular. Another harmful proposal mandates all Lifeline providers require payment from Lifeline recipients. This would eliminate the no-cost Lifeline products that serve those without bank accounts or good credit scores, consumers fleeing domestic violence, and those who frequently experience homelessness or irregular work.

"We urge the FCC to step back from these harmful proposals that will destabilize the Lifeline

program,” **said Wein.** “Instead the FCC should focus on ensuring that the program integrity measures from the 2016 Lifeline Modernization and Reform order are implemented in a timely fashion and on strengthening the Lifeline program so that it can play a key role in helping to bridge the digital divide.”

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Since 1969, the nonprofit National Consumer Law Center® (NCLC®) has used its expertise in consumer law and energy policy to work for consumer justice and economic security for low-income and other disadvantaged people, including older adults, in the United States. NCLC’s expertise includes policy analysis and advocacy; consumer law and energy publications; litigation; expert witness services, and training and advice for advocates. NCLC works with nonprofit and legal services organizations, private attorneys, policymakers, and federal and state government and courts across the nation to stop exploitative practices, help financially stressed families build and retain wealth, and advance economic fairness. www.nclc.org