



March 15, 2016

Chairman Tom Wheeler
Commissioner Mignon Clyburn
Commissioner Michael O’Rielly
Commissioner Ajit Pai
Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel
Federal Communications Commission
445 Twelfth Street, SW
Washington DC 20554

Re: WC Docket No. 11-42, Lifeline and Link Up Reform and Modernization

Dear Chairman Wheeler and Commissioners Clyburn, O’Rielly, Pai, and Rosenworcel,

We write as business and education leaders to encourage the FCC to act now to modernize the critically important Lifeline universal service program by including a broadband option and making other program improvements. Our businesses depend on broadband to grow and we believe this is no less true for all Americans – high-speed Internet at home, at school and at work is no longer a luxury but a necessity for learning and work.

There are many paths toward ensuring that all Americans have access to high-speed Internet, including private sector and public sector initiatives, and we believe that modernizing the 30-year-old Lifeline program is one critical step toward achieving this goal. Including in broadband telecommunications and new program efficiencies in Lifeline will make a significant contribution to the expansion of broadband by making it more affordable and accessible in currently hard to serve rural and urban communities.

Research shows that expanding access to broadband fosters economic growth and improves personal income, expands educational opportunity for young students and older workers, facilitates individuals’ access to government services that are now increasingly available online, and improves access to health care. Broadband has, essentially, become a utility, like water and electricity. As the FCC correctly points out, when 34 million Americans – 10 percent of all Americans – do not have broadband service, we have a national crisis.¹

¹FCC Fact Sheet, <https://www.fcc.gov/document/fact-sheet-chairman-wheelers-proposed-2016-broadband-progress-report>

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- Increasing broadband access is good for our economy. The Internet is our nation's growth engine, with increasing broadband penetration tied to increasing GDP.² Excluding 10 percent of the population from participating in the Internet and all that flows from it not only perpetuates inequality, it harms our national economy.
- Increasing broadband access is good for education. Education is a driver of our future economy. Most school children today are assigned homework that requires the Internet and yet forty percent of households with school aged children and annual family incomes below \$25,000 do not have broadband access.³ The FCC's 2014 reform of the E-Rate program set in motion steps to close the "fiber gap" by putting all schools and libraries on the road to connectivity. By extending the Lifeline program to broadband the Commission can now help close the "homework gap."
- Increasing broadband access is good for promoting self-reliance. The Internet represents a route out of economic distress and towards self-reliance; all Americans should be able to follow that route. Many companies now begin their hiring process on the Web; for some it is the only way to apply for a job. One study found that job seekers who have Internet access find work faster than those who do not.⁴ Similarly, government services are delivered via the Internet. Whether it is applying for VA benefits, or getting Social Security forms, the Internet is the way government does business as well.

To encourage economic growth, improve education, and promote self-reliance, we urge you to meaningfully modernize the Lifeline program by including broadband services and making the program even more efficient.

² Common Sense Kids Action Policy Brief,

https://d2e111jq13me73.cloudfront.net/sites/default/files/uploads/kids_action/benefits_of_broadband_expansion_to_americas_economy_education_and_health-cska-2015.pdf

³ Pew Research Center analysis of American Community Survey data, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/04/20/the-numbers-behind-the-broadband-homework-gap/ft_15004-17_broadband

⁴ "Is Internet Job Search Still Ineffective?",

www.econ.ucsb.edu/~pjkuhn/Research%20Papers/NLS_NetSearch.pdf

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Thank you very much for your consideration of our views.

Sincerely,

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Vice President of US Public Policy
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Cofounder and CEO
TPG Capital

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