



June 20, 2016

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**Support Lifeline  
Oppose H.R. 5525, The End Taxpayer Funded Cell Phones Act of 2016**

Dear Representative:

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition charged by its diverse membership of more than 200 national organizations to promote and protect the rights of all persons in the United States, we urge you to oppose H.R. 5525, the "End Taxpayer Funded Cell Phones Act of 2016," sponsored by Representative Austin Scott. Passage of H.R. 5525 would undercut both the goals of the Lifeline program and the principles for Lifeline modernization supported by our members and a wide range of other consumer and public interest organizations.

The Leadership Conference believes that it is essential to ensure that people of color, low-income people, and other vulnerable populations have access to broadband. Without Internet access, students of color cannot do their homework, working single mothers cannot earn degrees online at night, and seniors and people with disabilities cannot utilize the most modern and accessible health care. Accordingly, we were a strong supporter of the Federal Communications Commission's proposed modernization of the Lifeline program to include broadband, to address the persistent digital divide between those who have a broadband Internet connection and those who do not. Cost remains a serious barrier to internet access for millions of Americans. The Lifeline program can help alleviate this costly burden. Earlier this year, the Federal Communications Commission adopted sweeping reforms, including minimum standards obligations, additional cost-control measures, and a budget of \$2.25 billion annually. As a result, for the first time, this public-private partnership will offer a modest financial subsidy to low-income people who cannot afford access to the internet.

H.R. 5525 prohibits commercial mobile services or commercial mobile data services from receiving Lifeline support. Prohibiting the use of mobile devices in Lifeline would be a counter-productive measure that would reduce the likelihood that low-income people could reestablish financial stability. As we demonstrated in our comments to the Federal Communications Commission on this matter, it is evident from marketplace choices that mobile services have been a particularly important choice for people of color and low-income people.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, access to mobile services align with important anti-poverty programs.<sup>2</sup>

The Federal Communications Commission's recent modernization has already established increasing minimum standards for mobile communications, along with careful cost-control

<sup>1</sup> See Comments of Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, FCC WC Docket 11-42 at 3 (filed August 31, 2015) (citing Pew Research Center, *U.S. Smartphone Use in 2015* (April 1, 2015) available at: <http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/04/01/us-smartphone-use-in-2015>).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*



measures. In particular, the Commission will phase out support for voice-only services by 2021 after a full review and report prior to the phase out. Thus, H.R. 5525 is unnecessary and will fail to protect low-income people and people of color.

We urge you to oppose H.R. 5525. Thank you for considering our views. Please contact Leadership Conference Media/Telecommunications Task Force Co-Chairs Cheryl Leanza, UCC Office of Communication, Inc., at 202-904-2168, Michael Macleod-Ball, ACLU, at 202- 675-2309, or Corrine Yu, Leadership Conference Managing Policy Director at 202-466-5670, if you would like to discuss the above issues.

Sincerely,



Wade Henderson  
President & CEO



Nancy Zirkin  
Executive Vice President