

September 30, 2015

Chairman Tom Wheeler
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Re: Lifeline Modernization, WC Docket No. 11-42

Dear Chairman Wheeler:

We represent a diverse coalition of organizations that work with low-income people, seniors, people with disabilities, veterans, educators, and historically disenfranchised people [add other constituencies/signers]. While our work in these diverse communities varies, each of our organizations can point to the importance of broadband Internet access as a vital tool for our constituents. Yet the digital divide between those who have a broadband Internet connection and those who do not continues to persist. Cost remains a critical barrier. For this reason, we write to support the Federal Communications Commission's proposal to modernize the Lifeline program this year by including in it, for the first time, a subsidy to defray the cost of broadband access for low-income households.

Access to broadband enables access to education and job opportunities, invaluable health information, and social services. Broadband is essential for anyone who goes to school or seeks to further enhance their skills. Seven in ten teachers assign homework that requires the Internet and yet 5 million households with children don't have home access, leading to a "homework gap."¹ Obtaining a job without access to the kinds of training programs or education available online that can help jobseekers upgrade skills in the modern economy is a daunting proposition. And more than 80 percent of Fortune 500 companies, including companies like Wal-Mart and Target only accept job applications online.² The effectiveness of federal and state programs and health care providers to assist seniors, veterans and people with disabilities would improve dramatically if all those populations could communicate via broadband. And despite libraries' Herculean efforts to serve the unserved, nearly seven out of 10 public libraries report they do not have enough computers to meet demand all or some part of the day.³

Though Internet access is a tool that has revolutionized almost every sector and every part of our personal lives, substantial numbers of people still do not have access. While 92 percent of households with incomes between \$100,000 and \$150,000 have broadband service, the adoption rate is only:

- 47 percent for households with income below \$25,000;⁴
- 64 percent for African Americans and 53 percent for Hispanics;⁵
- 63 percent for people with disabilities;⁶
- 56 percent for people age 65 and over;⁷
- 51 percent for people with limited English proficiency;⁸
- 38 percent for households that prefer Spanish.⁹

Cost is often cited as one of the most important reasons household do not have, or lose, their broadband subscriptions.¹⁰ The federal Lifeline program can alleviate this costly burden.

We urge you to modernize the Lifeline program this year to include broadband and ensure that all people in the U.S. have fair access to modern and essential communications services.

Sincerely,

¹ Common Sense Kids Action Policy Brief, *The Benefits of Broadband Expansion to America's Economy, Education and Health* (June 2015).

² Gerry Smith, *Without Internet, Urban Poor Fear Being Left Behind*, Huffington Post (March 2012).

³ American Library Association, *Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study* (2011-2012).

⁴ File, Thom and Camille Ryan, *Computer and Internet Use in the United States: 2013*, American Community Survey Reports, ACS-28, U.S. Census Bureau, Table 1 (2014) (ACS 2013).

⁵ Zickuhr, Kathryn and Aaron Smith, *Home Broadband 2013*, Pew Research Center at 3 (Aug 2013).

⁶ ACS 2013 at Table 1.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ Lee Rainie, Director, Pew Internet and American Life Project, Presentation at Washington Post Live 2013 Bridging the Digital Divide forum (Nov. 5, 2013).

¹⁰ Aaron Smith, Pew Research Center, *U.S. Smartphone Use in 2015* (April 2015).