

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 15, 2017

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

Dear Chairman Pai:

We write today regarding the recently proposed changes to the Lifeline program, which among other effects, will significantly limit options available to low-income veterans to secure broadband and voice service.

Since 1985, when the Lifeline Program was established under the Reagan Administration, it has provided an essential service to low-income individuals by connecting them to job opportunities, family members, emergency services, and more. President George W. Bush expanded the program in 2005 to include wireless phones, and in 2016, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) included broadband as a supported service, giving participants a better opportunity to connect with the world around them.

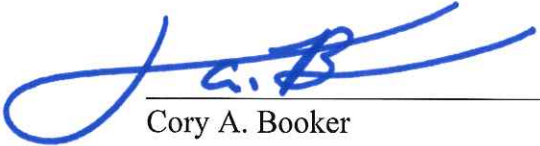
Unfortunately, recent proposals outlined by the Commission would decrease participation in the Lifeline program and stifle competition. Many Americans, including veterans, could be negatively impacted by these proposals. In an era when services for veterans are accessed more easily online, such as through the Veteran Administrations' e-Benefits program, it is imperative that those who have served our country have affordable access to broadband and voice services. Currently, 10 to 13 percent of Lifeline users are veterans. Many of them rely on Lifeline to access their education and financial benefits as well as critical health services. In August, the Trump Administration announced efforts to expand telehealth services beyond the 700,000 veterans who used them last year. These services allow veterans to book appointments online and receive diagnoses via video chat. These important and necessary advances are rendered useless however, for any of the approximately 1.5 million veterans living in poverty who do not have access to affordable broadband. The Lifeline program is a critical tool which helps connect low-income veterans and their families to the services they need.

One major area of concern is the proposal to limit carrier participation to only facilities-based providers. This change would affect 75 percent of participants who subscribe to mobile voice or broadband services provided by resellers. This means that 8.5 million current Lifeline customers could lose access to their wireless service. Limiting Lifeline to facilities-based carriers removes much of the opportunity for low-income consumers to receive subsidized wireless services. In a time when digital connectivity is increasingly important as a tool to actively engage in professional and economic activities, we must not create barriers to access. It is also important to

note that some of the nation's largest facilities-based providers have already received permission from the FCC to opt out of providing Lifeline-subsidized broadband services. This means that willing and eligible participants, including thousands of veterans, may have few to no choices when it comes to broadband, erasing much of the progress which the program has made in recent years.

We ask that the Commission consider the effects of its proposal on veterans and citizens more broadly.

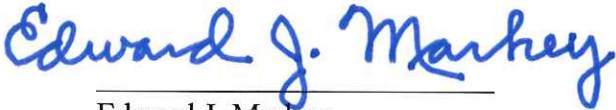
Sincerely,




Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator