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Affordable Connectivity for Families Traumatized by Domestic Violence

Lifeline is a federal program created in 1985 to help low-income consumers afford telephone service. The program now includes wireless service and broadband internet, and helps low-income victims and survivors of domestic violence in every state and territory afford voice and broadband service. But the FCC may devastate the program by drastically reducing the number of eligible service providers and limiting the reach of Lifeline. The FCC's proposals would raise costs for two-thirds of current Lifeline households, including victims and survivors of domestic violence whose access to affordable communications can be a matter of life and death.



Lifeline is a life-saving program for victims of domestic violence. Access to an affordable wireless phone service provides a lifeline for victims of domestic violence. Victims often suffer from social isolation at the hands of their abuser and a cell phone can make them feel less alone. With their own phone, victims can dial 911, access support services, or call a friend or family member for help. The National Network to End Domestic Violence reports that domestic violence hotlines nationwide typically receive over 20,200 calls a day, and victims need access to a phone to get that help.



Affordable broadband access connects families of domestic violence to vital online resources. The internet is a helpful support tool for domestic violence survivors to find information, share their stories, and transition to a life after abuse. The Lifeline program offers a bridge to support systems that are out of reach for survivors without reliable voice and broadband services.

Lifeline helps survivors access employment and housing opportunities. At least half of employed victims of domestic violence lose their jobs as a result of abuse, which contributes to the role of domestic violence as a leading cause of homelessness in the U.S. Survivors often face significant barriers to securing safe and affordable housing and gainful employment. 74% of Lifeline subscribers enjoy broadband access on their smartphone or computer – allowing them to access programs offering interview coaching and skills workshops and housing assistance. Once employed, the unfortunate reality of today's workplace often demands that employees have wireless phone access to receive "just-in-time" schedule changes and updates.

Lifeline helps bridge the digital divide for victims and survivors. Lifeline products serve some of the most economically fragile consumers, including those traumatized by domestic violence. Survivors are often left without access to secure bank accounts, with no or poor credit, and without a physical address necessary to obtain conventional contract cell phone and broadband services. Prepaid wireless providers participating in the Lifeline program provide the only safe and affordable option for these individuals.

Rationing Lifeline and slashing service providers will increase the cost of life-saving access for families who experience domestic violence. The FCC must keep the Lifeline program's focus on people and maintain affordable voice and broadband service for all.