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Public Service Commission

October 18, 2013

VIA ELECTRONIC FILING

The Honorable Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20554

Re: Ex Parte Comments of the Florida Public Service Commission in WC Docket No. 11-42, Lifeline and Link-Up Reform and Modernization; WC Docket No. 03-109, Lifeline and Link-Up, CC Docket No. 96-45, Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service; and WC Docket No. 12-23, Advancing Broadband Availability Through Digital Literacy Training

Dear Ms. Dortch:

Forwarded herewith are Ex Parte comments of the Florida Public Service Commission in the above dockets regarding the Lifeline Reform 2.0 Coalition Petition.

Bob Casey at (850) 413-6974 is the primary staff contact on these comments.

Sincerely,
/ s /
Cindy B. Miller
Senior Attorney

CBM:tf
cc: James Bradford Ramsay, NARUC

**Before the
Federal Communications Commission
Washington, D.C. 20554**

In the Matter of:)	
)	
Lifeline and Link Up Reform and Modernization)	WC Docket No. 11-42
)	
Petition for Rulemaking to Further Reform the Lifeline Program)	WC Docket No. 11-42
)	
Lifeline and Link Up)	WC Docket No. 03-109
)	
Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service)	CC Docket No. 96-45
)	
Advancing Broadband Availability Through Digital Literacy Training)	WC Docket No. 12-23

**EX PARTE COMMENTS OF
THE FLORIDA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION**

CHAIRMAN RONALD A. BRISÉ

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INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

On February 6, 2012, the Federal Communications Commission (“FCC”) released a Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (FCC 12-11) regarding Lifeline and Link Up Reform and Modernization. On June 28, 2013, the Lifeline Reform 2.0 Coalition (“Coalition”)¹ filed a Petition for Rulemaking to Further Reform the Lifeline Program (“Petition”). The Coalition proposed three core measures that serve as the centerpiece of its reform package, including:

- Reviewing government-issued photo Identification at the time of enrollment;
- Retaining copies of Identification and proof of eligibility documentation; and
- Requiring employee review and approval of enrollments prior to activation

On July 15, 2013, the FCC issued Public Notice DA 13-1576, seeking comments on the Coalition’s Petition. The Florida Public Service Commission (FPSC) submits these Ex Parte comments in response to the comments and reply comments received by the FCC regarding the Coalition’s Petition. The FPSC encourages the FCC to consider the following:

1. The Coalition should be applauded for their efforts to combat waste, fraud and abuse in the Lifeline program. However, the FPSC believes a review of a valid government-issued photo identification such as proposed by the Coalition is burdensome and unnecessary in Florida when Florida’s Lifeline Electronic Coordinated Enrollment process is used.

¹ Boomerang Wireless, LLC, Blue Jay Wireless, LLC, Global Connection Inc. of America, i-wireless LLC and Telrite Corporation. All Coalition members listed have a pending wireless ETC designation petition at the FCC for Florida or have already been approved as a wireless ETC in Florida.

2. Eligible Telecommunications Carriers (ETCs) can easily retain the FPSC notification as proof the Lifeline applicant has been verified as eligible for participation in the Lifeline program without the need for retention of a copy of the applicant's government-issued photo identification.

1. REVIEWING GOVERNMENT-ISSUED PHOTO IDENTIFICATION AT THE TIME OF ENROLLMENT

In its Petition, the Coalition proposes that “[a]ll Lifeline ETCs should be required to request and review valid government-issued photo identification from Lifeline applicants before enrolling subscribers in the Lifeline program.” The FPSC supports the Michigan Public Service Commission comments² which state that “[t]he in-person requirement prohibits customers from subscribing by telephone and on-line, and discriminates against consumers that do not have ready access to transportation. Similarly, a requirement for government-issued photographic identification discriminates against consumers that do not have ready access to transportation to obtain the necessary identification.” The FPSC also supports Cox Communications, Inc.’s reply comments³ describing the Coalition proposal as burdensome with little benefit. The in-person requirement to review government-issued photo identification would prohibit customers from applying for Lifeline through on-line Lifeline Electronic Coordinated Enrollment processes such as is available in Florida.

In 2010, the National Broadband Plan recommended that the FCC encourage state agencies responsible for Lifeline and Link Up to streamline benefit enrollment and suggested the use of unified online applications for social services. (FCC 12-11, ¶171) The Florida Lifeline Electronic Coordinated Enrollment Process is consistent with the vision of the FCC. Florida

² Comments of the Michigan Public Service Commission, WC Docket No. 11-42, filed August 14, 2013.

³ Reply Comments of Cox Communications, Inc., WC Docket No. 11-42, filed August 29, 2013.

implemented a streamlined, efficient, and verifiable Lifeline Electronic Coordinated Enrollment process to eliminate the possibility of fraud, waste, and abuse as was recommended in the National Broadband Plan and mentioned in FCC Order 12-11.

The FCC's March 4, 2011 Notice of Proposed Rulemaking also recommended use of a coordinated enrollment process to improve administrative efficiency and protect and improve program access. In this regard, the FCC stated:

We also seek comment on ways to reduce barriers to participation in the program by service providers and low-income households, specifically through the use of coordinated enrollment with other social service assistance programs and the development of a national database that could be used for enrollment and verification of ongoing eligibility. These proposals are intended to improve administrative efficiency, improve service delivery, and protect and improve program access for eligible beneficiaries. (FCC11-32, ¶ 151)

Moreover, the FCC stated:

While we place limitations on how states' automatic enrollment processes can be utilized, we encourage coordinated enrollment and recognize coordinated enrollment as a best practice in light of the overwhelming support in the record and the benefits of coordinated enrollment (FCC 12-11, ¶174)

The FPSC has streamlined Lifeline enrollment processes using current technologies, and reduced paperwork burdens for the FPSC and ETCs, which embodies the objectives mentioned in the Lifeline Reform Order. Requiring a review of a valid government-issued photo identification at the time of application would appear to be contrary to the FCC's goals and objectives to streamline the Lifeline application process.

The Coalition should be commended for their efforts to combat waste, fraud and abuse in the Lifeline program, but consideration should be given to states such as Florida that put in place a streamlined, efficient, and verifiable Lifeline Electronic Coordinated Enrollment process. This process involves a computer interface between the FPSC and the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) where no in-person review of government-issued photo identification or even hard-copy application or certification is necessary.⁴ Only Lifeline applicants who have been verified as currently participating in Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), or the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program are approved through the Florida Lifeline Electronic Coordinated Enrollment process.⁵ The DCF uses LexisNexis Risk Solutions to authenticate the identity of people applying online for public assistance. The LexisNexis technology helps the DCF confirm the identification of applicants before processing their benefit applications. By verifying and authenticating the identity of the applicant before processing their application, DCF knows whether the person seeking benefits is truly the individual applying for them.

Consumers already participating in Medicaid, SNAP, or TANF can also apply for Lifeline on the FPSC website. The FPSC mainframe computer automatically conducts a real-time query in the DCF computer to verify the applicant is currently participating in the program(s) checked by the applicant. If the DCF computer response message confirms participation in a qualifying Lifeline program, the FPSC computer automatically generates an e-

⁴ DCF is the Florida administrator for the Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program. Ninety percent of DCF's applications are submitted over the web. A detailed description of the Florida Lifeline Electronic Coordinated Enrollment process was filed at the FCC under WC Docket No. 11-42 on May 31, 2013.

⁵ Applicants wishing to qualify for Lifeline using Supplemental Security Income, Federal Public Housing Assistance, Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, National School Lunch Free Lunch Program, or Bureau of Indian Affairs Programs can complete a hard-copy Lifeline application available on the FPSC Web site, and submit it to their telephone provider along with verification that they are currently participating in one of these programs.

mail to the appropriate ETC that it has a Lifeline applicant's information available for retrieval on the FPSC confidential website.

In addition to the Florida Lifeline Electronic Coordinated Enrollment process, a computer interface is available for Florida ETCs to conduct a real-time query into DCF's database to determine if a Lifeline applicant is currently participating in Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program. Should a Florida ETC use this DCF interface, an in-person review of government-issued photo identification photo of an applicant would be unnecessary.

In its reply comments, the Coalition modified their original comments regarding in-person government issued photo Identification review to add the possibility of "utilizing a database check" or verifying "through other reasonable means." Specifically, the Coalition stated:

ETCs should be required to verify the identity of Lifeline applicants as part of the enrollment process, which could effectively be accomplished by viewing photo identification, by utilizing a database check or through other reasonable means.

The FPSC believes a review of a valid government-issued photo identification such as originally proposed by the Coalition is unnecessary in Florida when Florida's Lifeline Electronic Coordinated Enrollment process is used. The Florida Lifeline Electronic Coordinated Enrollment process utilizes the Florida DCF database to verify current participation in Medicaid, SNAP or TANF.

**2. RETAINING COPIES OF IDENTIFICATION AND PROOF OF SUBSCRIBER
ELIGIBILITY DOCUMENTATION**

In its Petition, the Coalition proposes that the FCC should require ETCs to retain copies of government-issued identification and proof of eligibility. As mentioned above, the FPSC

believes that government-issued photo identification is unnecessary and burdensome when the Florida Lifeline Electronic Coordinated Enrollment process is used. When a Lifeline applicant is approved using Florida's Lifeline Electronic Coordinated Enrollment process, the applicant's information is automatically posted on the FPSC confidential Website for retrieval by the appropriate ETC. The FPSC automatically sends the ETC an e-mail advising that a Lifeline applicant has been approved through Florida's Lifeline Electronic Coordinated Enrollment process and the applicant's information is available for retrieval on the FPSC Website via the ETC's log-in and password. ETCs can easily retain the FPSC notification as proof the Lifeline applicant has been verified as eligible for participation in the Lifeline program without the need for retention of a copy of the applicant's government-issued photo identification.

CONCLUSION

The FPSC continues to be proactive regarding the Lifeline program to ensure that low-income Florida consumers have the ability to obtain and retain affordable telephone service. The FPSC continues to strive for accountability in the universal service program and safeguard the federal universal service fund from fraud, waste, and abuse. The FPSC encourages the FCC to consider the proposed recommendations noted in these comments.

Respectfully submitted,
/ s /
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DATED: October 18, 2013