



For Immediate Release
Contact: Regina L. Davis, rdavis@naruc.org

State Regulators Urge Congress to Keep Essential Lifeline Protections for Voice and Broadband Consumers

Removing ETC Designation Undermines State Programs for Vulnerable Populations

WASHINGTON (April 20, 2021) — A significant number of state utility regulators have endorsed a letter from the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners urging Congress to keep existing protections in place for the Federal Communications Commission's Lifeline Broadband and Voice Program.

The Federal Lifeline Program was established in 1985 and currently provides up to a \$9.25 monthly discount on service for eligible customers and up to \$34.25 a month for those on Tribal lands. To qualify, an individual's income must be at or below 135 percent of the federal poverty level or participate in certain assistance programs.

Earlier this month, a coalition comprised of 46 organizations wrote to members of Congress calling for drastic reforms to the Lifeline program; specifically, a request to eliminate the current Eligible Telecom Carrier requirement for service providers. This designation helps ensure the quality of service for low-income customers while limiting the opportunity for waste, fraud and abuse of the system. The current ETC designation process defaults under state authority. As Congress intended, many states provide subsidy programs that complement the federal program and engage in rigorous oversight; therefore, removing state-level checks and balances can lead to substandard service and inflated subsidy claims from carriers.

"Investigations by state regulators have uncovered instances where service providers have applied for millions of dollars in federal subsidies for services never rendered," said NARUC President and Idaho regulator Paul Kjellander. "The value of state oversight cannot be overlooked and any attempt to undermine that process will quite likely harm members of our most vulnerable communities — the elderly and the poor."

"The proponents of this reform include many communications carriers, those groups with a self-interest in reducing the level of scrutiny while increasing their subsidies. However, as regulators, our job is to serve the public interest," said Massachusetts Commissioner Karen Charles Peterson, who chairs NARUC's Committee on Telecommunications. "I am pleased to see the number of fellow regulators joining NARUC's response to this coalition's letter."

To read NARUC's response letter, endorsed by 98 commissioners from 36 states and two territories, go to <https://bit.ly/3tEI5Ta>.

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About NARUC

NARUC is a non-profit organization founded in 1889 whose members include the governmental agencies that are engaged in the regulation of utilities and carriers in the fifty states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. NARUC's member agencies regulate telecommunications, energy, and water utilities. NARUC represents the interests of state public utility commissions before the three branches of the federal government.