

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: APRIL 22, 2011

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**PROPOSED FCC CHANGES TO LIFELINE PROGRAM
WILL RAISE BARRIERS FOR RURAL HOUSEHOLDS AND THE HOMELESS**

Washington, DC – The National Consumer Law Center (NCLC) and 16 other consumer advocacy nonprofits submitted [comments](#) to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) detailing several concerns regarding proposed changes to modernize and update the Lifeline program, which provides affordable telephone service to low-income consumers throughout the country. Chief among those concerns is a proposed new eligibility criterion that would require Lifeline applicants to live in their own apartment and home and with a residential street address. Those living on rural postal delivery routes or in YMCAs would be excluded from the Lifeline program under the FCC’s proposal. The NCLC-led joint comments strongly oppose this.

“A consumer’s housing status should not play a role in Lifeline eligibility determinations,” says Olivia Wein, staff attorney at the National Consumer Law Center. “This is poor policy. It assumes that if you have a box on a rural route, live in a group home, or have doubled up with another family, you can’t participate in the Lifeline program.”

The joint consumer comments urge the FCC to consider a more equitable starting point in determining eligibility by clarifying that the Lifeline benefit is limited to one-benefit-per *household* and define household as *any individual or group of individuals who are living together as one economic unit*. This policy recognizes that many low-income families unfortunately live in an array of housing situations, especially in these rough economic times when permanent housing is out of reach for so many.

The consumer groups are also strongly opposed to capping the Lifeline fund. The program has suffered from years of poor outreach and now has a low, but growing participation rate. Capping Lifeline would cut off access to affordable telecommunications service when millions of households are still reeling from the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression. Lifeline provides essential access to affordable phone service. Families cannot find work and housing, obtain adequate medical care, contact emergency services, or speak with staff at children’s schools without a phone.

The group comments cover a range of issues involving strong Lifeline program design and the expansion of the Lifeline program to include broadband service. Consumer groups support the proposal to fund Lifeline broadband pilots to inform sound low-income broadband program design.

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The National Consumer Law Center[®] (NCLC[®]) is a non-profit organization specializing in consumer issues on behalf of low-income and other vulnerable people. Since 1969, NCLC has worked with legal services and organizations as well as government and private attorneys across the United States, to create sound public policy for low-income and elderly individuals on consumer issues.

