

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
January 9, 2012

Contacts:

Olivia Wein, 202.452.6252 ext 103, owein@nclc.org
Darlene Wong, 617.542.8010 ext 369, darlenewong@nclc.org
Jan Kruse, 617.542.8010 ext 361, jkruse@nclc.org

STATEMENT: FCC's Lifeline Reform Must Ensure That Eligible Low-Income Consumers Can Connect with Jobs, Housing, Medical Care and Other Essential Services

(WASHINGTON, DC) Consumer advocates urged the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to ensure that all eligible low-income people can continue to access the full benefits of Lifeline, the important safety net program that enables them to access affordable telecommunications service. Earlier today, FCC Chairman Genachowski said that he will circulate his draft order to the other FCC Commissioners for review. The FCC may vote on the order by the end of January. "As Chairman Genachowski points out when times are tough the need for programs like Lifeline increase," said Olivia Wein, staff attorney for the National Consumer Law Center. "As so many continue to struggle to find jobs and housing, it is essential that eligible households are able to access the full benefits of the Lifeline program to help them to get back on their feet," said Wein.

Consumer advocates support the FCC Chairman's commitment to extend broadband access to low-income consumers. Lifeline assistance is necessary not only for consumers who choose to maintain landline phone service, but also necessary for consumers who choose voice over broadband service. It is also a positive step that the FCC will bring actions against companies that abuse the Lifeline program to ensure that program dollars are efficiently used to maximize access and affordability for low-income consumers.

"However," said Harry Geller, executive director of the Pennsylvania Utility Law Project, "our coalition is deeply concerned that the FCC may cap the Lifeline program. The value of the phone network grows as more of the population is connected to it and Lifeline keeps fragile households connected to their network. We will continue to work closely with the FCC to ensure that eligible consumers will remain able to fully benefit from the Lifeline program."

National Consumer Law Center, as part of a larger coalition of consumer advocates, has made recommendations to the FCC regarding how to reform the Lifeline program to rein in abuses while still providing essential landline and broadband services to eligible participants:
<http://www.nclc.org/issues/telecommunications.html>

This is a joint statement by the **National Consumer Law Center**; the **Pennsylvania Utility Law Project**; **Advocates for Basic Legal Equality** in Ohio; and the **Low Income Utility Advocacy Project**, a program of the Shriver Poverty Law Center, Voices for Illinois Children and Heartland Alliance for Human Needs and Human Justice.

###

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 nonprofit 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.