

Dear Chairman Carr, Commissioner Gomez, and Commissioner Trusty,

We, as Oregonians, are writing to ask that the proposed rule-making for the Lifeline Program on February 18th be dropped, protecting access to this critical program. We are currently seeing extremely difficult times for working-class Americans, and the scaling back or tampering with the Lifeline program would critically impact a service that is helping our most in-need community members.

CUB has dedicated its years to fighting for utility justice and affordability for all Oregonians. These changes would harm our state and the folks who need this help the most.

These changes could significantly reduce the rebates that low-income Oregonians use to access voice and internet services. Many of these community members are folks who have fallen on hard times and are trying to bounce back on their feet.

Conner, a CUB community member, reached out last November, during the government shutdown, asking for direct assistance and help getting on the lifeline program. Conner had been living out of his vehicle because he could not earn enough to maintain stable housing. He was able to get on to the program, which allows him access to voice/internet services and would allow him to obtain a phone or internet device needed to be able to apply for employment and get back on his feet. The proposed rule changes would directly harm people like Conner trying their hardest to acquire stability.

This program would also impact our state's Native communities. [In 2018, US Census data showed that 18% of Native Americans still lacked access to phone or internet services.](#) While a decade ago, 29% of Oregon Native urban households were found to have lacked reliable access to an internet or computer subscription, 10% lacked broadband entirely. Research conducted by community organizations also found that 20% of Native students lacked regular access to high-speed internet. The program provides additional funds to ensure that we can keep our frontier communities and historically underserved Native American communities connected. This is both a matter of digital equity and safety and resilience.

This federal administration has targeted multiple assistance programs that provide critical funds to Americans too many times. We are seeing a struggling economy, a stalling job market, and now face the possibility of energy and price insecurities due to conflicts this country is participating in; **now is not the time to jeopardize the access that most in-need community members have to their phone and internet services.** Too many Oregonians are feeling economic burdens and struggling to make ends meet.

We hope that you will reconsider the proposed rule changes and consider the millions of people throughout the country, and the thousands in Oregon, who will be harmed.

We, the undersigned Oregonians, thank you for hearing our concerns,