



October 26, 2018
By ECFS

Marlene Dortch, Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

RE: National Association of State Utility Consumer Advocates *Ex Parte* Letter,
WC Docket Nos. 17-287, 11-42, 09-197

Dear Ms. Dortch,

The National Association of State Utility Consumer Advocates (NASUCA) respectfully submits this *Ex Parte* Letter to address issues around the launch of the Lifeline National Eligibility Verifier (National Verifier). NASUCA has consistently advocated that eligible consumers should have access to affordable telecommunications services through the Lifeline program from a choice of providers. Recently, NASUCA reaffirmed its support of the Lifeline program in its 2018 Lifeline resolution¹ and February 2018 comments advocating to keep non-facilities-based carriers in the Lifeline program.²

Q Link recently filed an emergency petition with the Federal Communication Commission (Commission) identifying a problem in the current version of the National Verifier. Q Link petitioned the FCC to direct the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) to implement application programming interfaces (APIs) for the National Verifier that permit Eligible Telecommunications

¹ See, NASUCA Resolution No. 2018-01, "Urging the FCC and States to Assure that Lifeline Eligible Households in All Regions of the Nation Have Access to Voice and Broadband Internet Access Services from a Choice of Providers and Networks, Made More Affordable with Lifeline Support." Available at http://nasuca.org/nwp/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/2018-01-NASUCA-Affordable-Lifeline-Support-Resolution_-003.pdf.

² See *In the Matter of Lifeline Link Up Reform and Modernization*, WC Docket Nos. 17-287, et al., Comments of the National Association of State Utility Consumer Advocates, filed February 21, 2018.

Carriers (ETCs) to exchange information with the National Verifier on a machine-to-machine basis when consumers enroll in Lifeline.³

NASUCA agrees there is support for Q Link's position that the National Verifier should include APIs. The Commission's Lifeline Reform Third Report and Order, Paragraph 138 stated in part:

The National Verifier will also function as an interface for authorized users for many different activities. We agree with commenters and anticipate that eligible subscribers, Lifeline providers, states, and Tribal Nations will require access to establish or verify eligibility. We also expect the National Verifier to have varying interface methods to accommodate these different groups of users.[fn 390]⁴

In footnote 390, the Commission explained:

For example, the National Verifier may have an interface that is consumer-friendly and geared towards subscribers. It may have another interface that is geared toward providers that may allow application programming interfaces (machine-to-machine interaction).⁵

The current version of the National Verifier, which is still being rolled out, properly includes a consumer-friendly interface, consistent with the Lifeline Reform Third Report and Order. NASUCA supports the ability of a consumer to make their own, independent query of the National Verifier – whether online or by paper application – to find out whether they are eligible. This allows the consumer who is concerned about sharing private information to first interact with the neutral National Verifier. This allows social service agencies and community groups to help consumers check their Lifeline eligibility. Once the consumer has confirmed Lifeline eligibility, the consumer can focus on finding the Lifeline provider and service offering that best meets the consumer's needs – whether wireline or wireless, voice and/or broadband internet access service.

NASUCA supports the addition of APIs to the National Verifier. These two approaches, the consumer-friendly National Verifier interface and the addition of an API so that ETCs can also help consumers check their eligibility, are complements which should collectively improve the ability of households to determine whether they are eligible for Lifeline.

On August 9, 2018, TracFone filed an emergency petition with the Commission raising another issue involving the National Verifier.⁶ TracFone explained that “[a]s the National Verifier has been rolled out in six states through a soft launch, it has become clear that USAC's implementation of the National Verifier suffers from a significant and unnecessary flaw: USAC is launching the Verifier before obtaining access to key databases necessary to automatically verify subscriber eligibility based on participation in qualifying federal programs, particularly Medicaid.”⁷ Because Medicaid recipients make up 29% of

³ See Emergency Petition of Q Link Wireless LLC for an Order Directing the Universal Service Administrative Company to Implement Machine-to-Machine Interfaces for the National Verifier, WC Docket Nos. 17-287, et al. (filed July 5, 2018).

⁴ *In the Matter of Lifeline Link Up Reform and Modernization*, WC Docket No. 11-42, et al., Third Report and Order, Further Report and Order, and Order on Reconsideration, 31 FCC Rcd 3962 (rel. Apr. 27, 2016), ¶ 138.

⁵ *Id.* fn. 390.

⁶ See Emergency Petition of TracFone Wireless, Inc. for an Order Directing USAC to Alter the Implementation of the National Verifier to Optimize the Automated and Manual Eligibility Verification Process, WC Docket Nos. 17-287, 11-42, 09-197 (filed August 9, 2018).

⁷ See *id.* at iii.

Lifeline enrollments, NASUCA is concerned that a large portion of eligible Lifeline consumers will lose access or be unable to enroll into Lifeline.

The need for improvements to the National Verifier highlighted by the Q Link and TracFone petitions require the Commission's prompt attention. NASUCA understands that there needs to be coordination between USAC, the Commission, and the state database administrators to get this right. The stakes are high for low-income populations that rely on Lifeline-supported voice and internet access services to stay connected for jobs, education, and healthcare.

Respectfully submitted,

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