

RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
CONNECTICUT

COMMITTEES:

AGING

ARMED SERVICES

COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

JUDICIARY

VETERANS' AFFAIRS, RANKING MEMBER

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

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706 HART SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

(202) 224-2823
FAX: (202) 224-9673

90 STATE HOUSE SQUARE, TENTH FLOOR
HARTFORD, CT 06103
(860) 258-6940
FAX: (860) 258-6958

915 LAFAYETTE BOULEVARD, ROOM 230
BRIDGEPORT, CT 06604
(203) 330-0598
FAX: (203) 330-0608

<http://blumenthal.senate.gov>

The Honorable Robert McDonald
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, Northwest
Washington, D.C. 20240

The Honorable Tom Wheeler
Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, Southwest
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Secretary McDonald and Chairman Wheeler,

I write to urge the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to create coordinated enrollment opportunities for veterans, particularly participants in VA's pension or homeless veterans programs, to easily enroll in the FCC's Lifeline Program. The Lifeline Program has provided telephone access to many low-income Americans for more than 30 years. Data technology is a vital capability for low-income and homeless veterans to improve their daily lives and we have a responsibility to ensure that our men and women who served in uniform are equipped to access their hard-earned benefits. The FCC should move forward with its proposal to expand the Lifeline Program to broadband connections, which will help bring this critical communications infrastructure into the homes of low-income veterans that deserve our help and support.

Both broadband and telecommunications technologies are pivotal to conduct daily activities, pursue job and housing opportunities and stay in touch with family members. Veterans can use the Lifeline Program discount to improve access to the technology that will allow them to contact VA for benefits or medical appointments, or to communicate with potential employers or housing providers. The traditional Lifeline discount specifically enables veterans to utilize VA hotlines, such as the Veterans Crisis Line, the VA Benefits and Help for Homeless Veterans hotlines as well as Department of Defense (DoD) hotlines for services and resources. The proposal to expand the Lifeline program to broadband, would help veterans access affordable quality health care services. With a broadband connection at home, veterans can check their claims status, apply for new benefits, download their health history, or view their military service record utilizing the eBenefits web portal, and apply for employment or housing opportunities through online resources.

I urge FCC and VA to collaborate on outreach efforts to veterans, veterans' and military service organizations, and housing organizations, to widely disseminate information on this

historically successful program, its benefits, and enrollment opportunities for eligible veterans. It is our duty to ensure that veterans with limited or no income are accessing each and every resource they may be eligible for. Many VA pension recipients may also be eligible to participate in the Lifeline Program based on their income levels. Similarly, many homeless veterans participating in the HUD-VASH program and other VA homeless programs may also have limited incomes that would mirror Lifeline eligibility qualifications; making any participating veteran automatically eligible. The fight to end veteran homelessness is still ongoing and we must ensure that we provide as much support as possible in order to ensure housing stability. I encourage FCC and VA to establish a coordinated enrollment system for the Lifeline discount for all veterans participating in VA programs based on qualifying income levels that indicate Lifeline eligibility.

As Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, I strongly believe that greater access to Lifeline benefits will provide support for our veterans' population as they transition from the armed services to civilian employment and as they transition from homelessness into housing. I greatly appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to collaborating with both of you to ensure that all veterans are aware of this benefit and are making use of it.

Sincerely,



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senate