

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 2, 2020

Mr. Jim Bahri, CEO
Airvoice Wireless LLC
2425 Franklin Road
Bloomfield Hills, MI 48302

Dear Mr. Bahri:

We write to urge your company to act to ensure that millions of low-income Americans who depend on the federal Lifeline program for mobile internet access have the connectivity they need during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The federal Lifeline service — which is administered by the Federal Communications Commission — pays companies like yours to provide essential phone, text, and internet connectivity to 9 million low-income households. During the COVID-19 public health crisis, internet service is more essential than ever for Americans now confined to their homes to stay connected to school, medical and emergency services, work, social services, friends and family. However, the basic wireless Lifeline service currently only provides subscribers with 3 GB of data per month. This is enough data to read email and access web pages, but certainly not enough to telework, regularly consult with doctors through telehealth services, or enable children to engage in interactive learning.

In addition to needing more mobile data, Americans need to be able to use Lifeline-provided broadband access on other devices. While smartphones can provide basic internet access and enable families to communicate, devices with larger-screens, such as tablets and laptops, are necessary to effectively work or study at home. Fortunately, almost all modern smartphones include built-in Wi-Fi hotspot functionality that allows one or more tablets or laptops to piggy-back off a smartphone's internet access at broadband speeds. However, wireless providers must first enable that capability, and many Lifeline providers frequently do not.

During this public health crisis, it is imperative that internet providers, like your company, act to ensure that the millions of American families who depend on the Lifeline program are not left behind by an ever-growing digital divide. Accordingly, we urge you to immediately take these steps:


- Enable hotspot access for all Lifeline subscribers, so that they can connect laptops or tablets to smartphones that support this feature;
- Ensure all Lifeline subscribers have access to 4G service, where available, with at least the same speed and priority of service that other resellers of mobile services of that network offer to their customers;
- Provide no-cost upgrades to existing subscribers using older smartphones sold by your company that lack hotspot functionality;
- Allow consumers to roll over some or all of their voice minutes and data allowances from one month to the next;

- Work with your network operator — such as AT&T, Verizon, or T-Mobile, who have all pledged to help American families during this crisis — and then substantially increase the monthly data allowance beyond 3 GB, at no cost to your Lifeline subscribers; and
- Provide your subscribers with clear instructions on how to access their smartphone hotspot capability, including via text message.

As a Lifeline provider, you have a unique opportunity to improve the education, health and economic outcomes of your subscribers during this pandemic. We appreciate you rising to the challenge and ask you to update us by April 8, 2020, on your progress implementing these priorities and on any other steps you are taking to improve your subscribers' access to the internet.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

/s/ Richard J. Durbin

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator

/s/ Jack Reed

Jack Reed
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Robert Menendez
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Van Hollen

Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Patty Murray
United States Senator



Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator