April 24, 2020

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor of California
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: California Lifeline Program- COVID 19 Relief

Dear Governor Newsom,

We write to commend you for working tirelessly and expeditiously to provide public health safeguards as well as social and economic relief during this unprecedented crisis. As such, we respectfully request that during the COVID-19 crisis you maximize and enhance the existing California Lifeline Program, an underutilized program that provides real access and connectivity to millions of low-income households.

California’s Lifeline program is the premier program in the nation. It offers low income families smartphone devices, unlimited talk and text, as well as some data. No other state in the nation provides these benefits to low income subscribers and no other state is positioned to maximize the Lifeline program during shelter at home policies.

Many advocates for programs such as CalFresh, unemployment, school nutrition, and other safety net programs, are currently working with providers to install the apps onto the devices being provided to Lifeline subscribers. This allows the subscriber to have immediate access to critical information to assist them during this crisis. Due to this effort, we are beginning to see increases in enrollment, correlated to the increase in need during this crisis. However, participation in the program is still less than 40%.

During this crisis we need to reach 90-100% participation levels as well as leverage all available resources. Therefore, the undersigned low income advocates respectfully request that as a direct response to COVID 19 the state maximizes and enhances the Lifeline program. Specifically:

- **Increase enrollment and retainment**
  - Engage low income advocates in outreach strategies
  - Allow customers to stay enrolled for 12-18 months before having to re-prove income verification (recertification process)
- **Simplify recertification process** by allowing providers to reach out to customers instead of the Third Party Administrator hired by the CPUC that is unknown to the customer.
  - **Further fix the recertification process** by allowing customers to recertify online as opposed to a mail in process

- **Increase Lifeline services**
  - Allow lifeline subscribers to have broadband access—a minimum of 8 GB a month
  - Allow more than one subsidy per household to accommodate distance learning.

- **Remove barriers to enrollment**—Thousands of eligible subscribers are unable to enroll because of limited documents or
  - Increase categorical eligibility to included Earned Income Tax Credit, Community College financial Aid, and Unemployment Insurance
  - Allow Prison ID as valid form of ID

- **Ensure budget projection meet needs**
  - The CPUC has discretion to fund the program based on need. The January projections are inadequate to address the growing need. We request an updated budget that reflects increased participation and enhanced services to low income families.

Again, we applaud your leadership during this crisis. We look forward to working with you and your office to increase the services and programs for the most underserved communities. Please contact Jessica Bartholow at jbartholow@wclp.org or Jose Atilio Hernandez at jhernandez@ideatecal.com if you have any additional questions.

Yours Truly,

Jessica Bartholow  
Policy Advocate  
Western Center on Law & Poverty

Veronica Padilla  
Veronica Padilla  
Executive Director  
Pacoima Beautiful

Paulina Gonzalez-Brito  
Paulina Gonzalez-Brito  
Executive Director  
California Reinvestment Coalition
Becky Moskowits  
Senior Attorney  
Law Foundation of Silicon Valley

Carlos Vaquerano  
Executive Director  
Clínica Monseñor Oscar A. Romero

Melissa A. Morris  
Attorney  
The Public Interest Law Project

Daniel Faessler  
Attorney/ Clinical Supervisor  
East Bay Community Law Center

Kevin Aslanian  
Executive Director  
Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organizations

Stephen Bingham,  
National Lawyers Guild SF Bay Area  
Legislative Reform Committee

Amy Durrence  
Director of Law and Policy  
Free From

Samuel Nunez  
Executive Director  
Fathers & Families of San Joaquin

Elisha Smith Arrillaga  
Executive Director  
The Education Trust

Jose Atilio Hernandez  
Chairman ideateLABS

Cc  
Senate Pro Temp, Toni Atkins  
Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon  
Senator Holly Mitchell, Budget Chair  
Assemblymember Phil Ting, Budget Chair  
Senator Ben Hueso, Utilities and Commerce Chair  
Assemblymember Miguel Santiago, Communications and Conveyance Chair  
President of Commission, Marybel Batjer  
Commissioner Genevieve Shiroma  
Commissioner Martha Guzman