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**Contact: Derrick Owens
202-548-0202, derrick@w-t-a.org**

WTA Reviewing and Assessing the FCC's Lifeline Reform Order

WASHINGTON, D.C. (April 1, 2016) – WTA--Advocates for Rural Broadband supports the objectives of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to modernize and reform the Lifeline program for the broadband era. The Order adopted yesterday expands Lifeline support to allow low-income consumers to apply their Lifeline discount to broadband services that are increasingly important for participation in a 21st Century economy. The proposals adopted in the Order should also significantly reduce administrative burdens on small providers and increase resources available for investment in infrastructure by shifting enrollment and Lifeline eligibility verification to a third-party.

However, WTA has serious concerns about the elimination of support for unbundled voice, which remains an affordable way for consumers, particularly the elderly and those on fixed incomes, to keep in touch with family members and to access emergency services. WTA is also concerned with the inequity associated with providing inflationary adjustments for some USF program budgets and not others. WTA also believes that the FCC's creation of a new "Lifeline Broadband Provider" designation could allow these providers to cherry-pick only the most desirable areas to serve.

"WTA appreciates the work of the FCC to modernize the Lifeline program and to address the inefficiencies and significant burdens on providers in the program," said Derrick Owens, WTA's Vice President of Government Affairs. "The Lifeline program plays an important role in connecting low-income residents in rural high cost areas to basic communication services, which now include broadband. Over the coming days, we'll be analyzing the Order and discussing the details with our members to determine how it will affect them and their abilities to serve their communities. WTA looks forward to continuing to work with the FCC to address our concerns and to ensure that the goals of universal service are met for all consumers, rural and urban alike," said Owens.

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WTA represents more than 300 small, rural telecommunications carriers providing voice, data and video-related services in the United States. WTA's members serve some of the most rural and hard-to-serve communities in the country and are on the forefront of bringing 21st Century telecommunications services to rural America. To learn more about WTA, visit www.w-t-a.org.