

Stop Congress from Cutting Struggling Americans' Lifeline: Vote No on H.R. 5525

From: The Committee on Energy and Commerce - Minority Staff

Sent By: ryan.skukowski@mail.house.gov

Bill: H.R. 5525

Date: 6/20/2016

Dear Colleague:

On Tuesday, the House will vote on a bill that would rip lifesaving 9-1-1 services out of struggling Americans' hands. We urge you to vote against this bill.

At least 9.8 million Americans receive Lifeline support to help them afford cell phone service.

For low-income Americans, their phones truly are their lifeline. It's how the unemployed find a job. It's how victims of domestic violence call loved ones for help. It's how we all reach 9-1-1 during a crime or other emergency. And it's how school age children from poor families access the internet.

This bill would rip these lifesaving devices out of the hands of the people who need them most.

- **The Elderly:** Older, low-income Americans need access to Lifeline to stay connected and manage healthcare. Nearly 3.7 million older adults live in poverty. Another 2.4 million older adults live in families with incomes marginally above the poverty threshold.
- **Victims of Domestic Violence:** Research has shown a strong relationship between financial status and a woman's risk for domestic violence victimization. Austin Scott's bill would rip cell phones away from impoverished women who need a Lifeline supported phone to seek help.
- **SNAP Recipients:** Thirty-eight percent of Lifeline subscribers are eligible through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which provides nutrition assistance to millions of low-income families. Twenty-three percent of SNAP households are single-adult households where there is a female head of household.
- **Minorities:** The Black Women's Roundtable notes that "Black women, in spite of attainments in higher education and consistently leading all women in labor market participation, continue to be among the lowest paid and often in need of Lifeline services."

- **The Disabled:** Disabled Americans face a severe digital divide. Only 51 percent of persons with disabilities used the internet in 2013, compared with 77 percent of the general population.
- **Kids:** The bill would exacerbate the Homework Gap by cutting school age children's access to the internet. Only 45 percent of school-age children in households that may qualify for SNAP benefits used the internet at home in 2013, compared with 70 percent of their peers in higher-income households. Lifeline is helping to remedy this inequity.

The legislation comes on the heels of real enforcement by the FCC to crack down on carriers that have abused the program, including a \$51 million fine against Total Call Mobile announced in April. Even more, this shameful bill was not considered under regular order and has not been considered by any committee.

If the critics of the Lifeline program sincerely think the costs of the program are a problem, they should work with us to address inequality, to close the gender pay gap, to raise the minimum wage, and to put more people to work through infrastructure projects.

Sincerely,

Frank Pallone, Jr.
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Commerce