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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
CHAIR, SUBCOMMITTEE ON RESPONSIVENESS
AND ACCOUNTABILITY TO OVERSIGHT
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
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Congress of the United States House of Representatives

September 8, 2026

The Honorable Brendan Carr
Chairman, Federal Communications Commission
45 L Street NE
Washington, DC 20554

WC Docket No. 26-227

Dear Chairman Carr:

I write on behalf of my constituents in Virginia's Sixth Congressional District regarding Verizon's notification of its intent to discontinue traditional copper-based landline telephone service across much of Virginia on or after October 23, 2026, subject to the Commission's approval. While I share the Commission's goal of modernizing our nation's networks and transitioning to more capable infrastructure, I share my constituents' concern that, in the rural communities I represent, the replacement options may not yet be adequate to protect public safety and basic connectivity.

Much of the Sixth District is mountainous and sparsely populated, and it presents exactly the conditions under which a premature copper cutoff can leave families without a reliable way to reach help. Three main concerns stand out.

First, large portions of my district remain cellular dead zones, where the mobile wireless devices offered as a substitute are unreliable or do not work at all. Second, fiber to the home has not yet been built out across these communities, leaving some households with no wireline alternative once copper is retired. Third, and most urgent, copper lines continue to function during power outages, while the battery backups on wireless and fiber replacements typically last only a day or less.

In a region that experiences extended weather-related outages, that gap can mean the loss of 911 access precisely when it is needed most. Legacy medical alert units, home alarm systems, and similar equipment may also fail on the replacement service without additional hardware that many seniors and fixed-income households cannot readily afford.

Importantly, the alternatives offered on paper do not always work in practice. Constituents who contacted my office were notified in writing that they could transition to satellite service. When technicians visited their homes, however, those constituents were told that, because of their specific locations, satellite would provide only very limited communication or potentially no usable service at all. An option that a carrier can point to on paper but that cannot function at a given address raises serious questions about whether it is a reasonable substitute for the service being withdrawn.

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I am also concerned that the process for participating in this proceeding is failing the very people it should protect. The Commission has set a comment deadline of September 10, 2026, yet most of those who have contacted my office are elderly, and many do not have reliable internet access, let alone the ability to navigate an unfamiliar federal filing system on their own. Compounding the problem, the Commission's coverage map is unreliable when searched by individual address. For some addresses it reports that the location is not in the service area while still listing providers for it, leaving residents unable to tell whether their homes would be covered at all.

I recognize that the Commission has committed, including in its recent copper-retirement proceedings, to safeguarding consumers' access to critical emergency services throughout this transition. I write to ask that the Commission honor that commitment in practice as it reviews Verizon's Virginia discontinuance. Specifically, I respectfully request that the Commission:

1. Confirm that a genuinely adequate replacement service, meeting the reliability and 911-access expectations the Commission has articulated, is available at each affected location before any discontinuance in the Sixth District takes effect;
2. Ensure that affected constituents receive clear, timely notice and a realistic transition window, along with accessible information about their options;
3. Give particular scrutiny to locations that lack both fiber availability and reliable mobile coverage, so that no household is left without a functioning means of contacting emergency services;
4. Extend or supplement the September 10, 2026, comment deadline, and provide a means to comment by telephone or by mail, so that affected residents who are elderly or lack reliable internet access have a fair opportunity to be heard; and
5. Correct the Commission's coverage map so that a search by individual address reliably reflects whether that address is served, rather than reporting a location as outside the service area while listing providers for it.

I would appreciate a written response describing how the Commission intends to verify replacement service adequacy in areas like mine. Thank you for your attention to the safety and connectivity of the families I represent.

Sincerely,

Ben Cline
Member of Congress

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