Lifeline: Affordable Telephone Service for Income-Eligible Subscribers

Lifeline is a government benefit program that provides discounts on monthly telephone service for eligible low-income subscribers to help ensure they can connect to the nation's communications networks, find jobs, access health care services, connect with family and their children's schools, and call for help in an emergency. Lifeline is supported by the federal Universal Service Fund (USF) **www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/universal-service-fund.**

What Benefits Are Available Under the Lifeline Program?

Lifeline provides discounts on monthly telephone service (wireline or wireless) for eligible subscribers. These discounts are currently set at $9.25 per month. Federal rules prohibit eligible low-income subscribers from receiving more than ONE Lifeline service per household. That is, eligible low-income subscribers may receive a Lifeline discount on either a wireline or a wireless service, but may not receive a Lifeline discount on both services at the same time. Additionally, only ONE Lifeline service may be obtained per household. "Household" is defined as any individual or group of individuals who live together at the same address as one economic unit. An "economic unit" is defined as "all adult individuals contributing to and sharing in the income and expenses of a household." However, Lifeline support is available to eligible low-income subscribers living in group living facilities. Lifeline applicants may demonstrate when initially enrolling in the program that any other Lifeline recipients residing at their residential address are part of a separate household by completing the one-per-household worksheet.

Enhanced benefits are provided to low-income subscribers who live on a federally recognized Indian Tribe's reservation, pueblo, or colony; on a former reservation in Oklahoma; within an Indian allotment; within an Alaska Native region established by the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act; or Hawaiian Homelands held in trust pursuant to the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act of 1920. See our consumer guide on Promoting Telephone Subscribership on Tribal Lands **www.fcc.gov/guides/promoting-telephone-subscribership-tribal-lands-0**) for more information.

How Do I Qualify for Lifeline Discounts?

The Lifeline program is available to eligible low-income subscribers in every state, territory, commonwealth, and on Tribal lands. You must be eligible to enroll. To participate in the program, subscribers must either have an income that is at or below 135% of the federal Poverty Guidelines **http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/index.cfm** or participate in one of the following assistance programs:

- Medicaid: **www.medicaid.gov/Medicaid-CHIP-Program-Information/Medicaid-and-CHIP-Program-Information.html**;
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (Food Stamps or SNAP): **www.fns.usda.gov/snap/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap**;
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI): **www.ssa.gov/ssi**;
- Federal Public Housing Assistance (Section 8): **http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/topics/housing_choice_voucher_program_section_8**;
- Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP): **www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ocs/programs/liheap**;

Federal Communications Commission · Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau · 445 12th St. SW. Washington, DC 20554
1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) · TTY: 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322) · Fax: 1-866-418-0232 · www.fcc.gov/consumer-governmental-affairs-bureau

- Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF): **www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/programs/tanf**;
- National School Lunch Program's Free Lunch Program: **www.fns.usda.gov/nslp/national-school-lunch-program**;
- Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance: **www.bia.gov/WhoWeAre/BIA/OIS/HumanServices/index.htm**;
- Tribally-Administered Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TTANF): **www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/programs/tribal/tribal-tanf**;
- Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR): **www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/programs/fdpir/default.htm**;
- Head Start (if income eligibility criteria are met): **www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ohs**; or
- State assistance programs (if applicable).

Who Pays for the Lifeline Program?

All telecommunications service providers and certain other providers of telecommunications must contribute to the federal USF based on a percentage of their end-user telecommunications revenues. These companies include wireline telephone companies, wireless telephone companies, and certain Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) providers.

Some subscribers may notice a “Universal Service” line item on their telephone bills. This line item appears when a company chooses to recover its USF contributions directly from its customers by billing them this charge. The FCC does not require this charge to be passed on to customers. Each company makes a business decision about whether and how to assess charges to recover its Universal Service costs.

Can I get more than one discounted service?

No. Federal rules prohibit eligible low-income subscribers from receiving more than **ONE** Lifeline discount per household. An eligible subscriber may receive a discount on either a wireline or wireless service, but not both. If you, or any person in your household, are currently receiving more than one monthly Lifeline service, you must select one provider to provide your Lifeline service and you must contact the other provider to de-enroll from their program. Subscribers found to be violating this rule may also be subject to criminal and/or civil penalties.

Key provisions of the Lifeline rules include the following:

- Lifeline is available only to eligible subscribers.
- Only one Lifeline benefit is permitted per household. Federal rules prohibit subscribers from receiving more than one Lifeline service. If a subscriber or his or her household currently has more than one Lifeline discounted service, they must select a single provider immediately or be subject to penalties.
- Only low-income subscribers with proof of eligibility are qualified to enroll.
- **Subscribers have an obligation to recertify their eligibility every year and should respond to their Lifeline Provider's attempts to recertify eligibility.** Subscribers must verify that they remain eligible to participate in the Lifeline program once each calendar year. Subscribers who fail to recertify their eligibility will be de-enrolled from the Lifeline Program and will not continue to receive the Lifeline benefit.

Federal Communications Commission · Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau · 445 12th St. SW. Washington, DC 20554
1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) · TTY: 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322) · Fax: 1-866-418-0232 · www.fcc.gov/consumer-governmental-affairs-bureau

Subscribers will be required to make certain certifications at the time of signing up for Lifeline, and each year after that, including:

- The subscriber or a member of the subscriber's household participates in a qualifying federal program or meets the income qualifications for Lifeline;
- The subscriber's household receives only one Lifeline supported service;
- The subscriber provided proof of eligibility, if required to do so;
- The number of individuals in the subscriber's household, if applying for Lifeline based on income;
- The information contained in the Lifeline application is true and correct to the best of the subscriber's knowledge and that providing false or fraudulent information to receive Lifeline benefits is punishable by law;
- That the subscriber resides on Federally-recognized Tribal lands, if applying for Enhanced Lifeline support;
- The subscriber must acknowledge that he or she may be required to recertify continued eligibility for Lifeline, and the subscriber will lose his or her Lifeline benefit if he or she fails to recertify subscriber.

The subscriber will also be required to provide certain information to the phone company or a state agency (depending how subscribers in their state sign up for Lifeline), including:

- Name and address information – Subscribers who do not have a permanent residential address must provide a temporary address, which cannot be a P.O. Box. If a subscriber resides at a temporary address, the telephone service provider or state agency may require confirmation of the address;
- Date of birth and the last 4 digits of the subscriber's Social Security Number;
- Subscribers participating in the Lifeline program must notify the telephone service provider within 30 days if the subscriber moves;
- Subscribers participating in the Lifeline program must notify the telephone service provider within 30 days if the subscriber is no longer eligible for Lifeline.

Frequently Asked Questions about the Lifeline Program

Am I eligible? To see if you are eligible, use the Lifeline Eligibility Pre-Screening Tool on the Universal Service Administrative (USAC) website at **www.lifelinesupport.org**.

How do I enroll? Apply for Lifeline through a Lifeline Program provider in your state or designated state agency. To locate a Lifeline provider in your state go to **www.lifelinesupport.org.**

What documentation do I need to provide at enrollment? Program Eligibility Verification - Acceptable documentation includes: Current or prior year's statement of benefits from a qualifying program; notice letter of participation in qualifying program; program participation documents (or copy); or another official document of a qualifying program. Income Eligibility Verification - Acceptable documentation includes: The prior year's state, federal or Tribal tax return; current income statement from an employer or paycheck stub; Social Security statement of benefits; Veterans Administration statement of benefits; Retirement or pension statement of benefits; Unemployment or Workers' Compensation statement of benefits; Federal or Tribal notice letter of participation in General Assistance; or divorce decree, child support award, or other official document containing income information. The subscriber must present the same type of documentation covering 3 consecutive months within the previous 12 months, if the documentation does not cover a full year of income.

Federal Communications Commission · Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau · 445 12th St. SW. Washington, DC 20554
1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) · TTY: 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322) · Fax: 1-866-418-0232 · www.fcc.gov/consumer-governmental-affairs-bureau

How is Household defined for purposes of the Lifeline Program? A household is defined as any individual or group of individuals who live together at the same address and share income and expenses. The Lifeline Eligibility Pre-Screening tool available at **www.lifelinesupport.org**can help you determine who is considered to be a member of your household.

What do I do if I am receiving more than one Lifeline service? Households with duplicate Lifeline services must select a single provider and de-enroll from other Lifeline programs. Subscribers violating the one per household rule may be subject to criminal and/or civil penalties.

Do I need to verify my eligibility? Yes. Once when you first enroll, and once every year that you have Lifeline supported service. Once you are enrolled in Lifeline, you must recertify your continued eligibility on an annual basis. If you become ineligible for the benefit, either because your income has increased, you no longer qualify for a federal benefit program, or someone else in your household gets a Lifeline service, you must contact your provider immediately to de-enroll from the program, otherwise you may be subject to penalties.

What if I have free Lifeline? If you receive Lifeline for free, you must use your service every 60 days in order to maintain the benefit.

Can I report Lifeline fraud? Yes. The FCC's Enforcement Bureau maintains a **dedicated Lifeline Fraud Tip Line –1-855-4LL-TIPS (or 1-855-455-8477)**, and an email address, **Lifelinetips@fcc.gov** – to facilitate reporting of possible fraud in the program. Callers are encouraged to provide as much detail as possible, including the name and contact information of the individuals involved and the companies they are using to receive Lifeline-supported phone service.

For More Information

To find more information about eligibility and how to apply for Lifeline benefits, visit the **www.lifelinesupport.org**, call USAC's toll-free number (1-888-641-8722), call the FCC's toll-free customer service number (1-888-CALL-FCC), or contact a Lifeline Program provider in your state.

For information about other telecommunications issues, visit the FCC's Consumer website (**www.fcc.gov/consumers**), or contact the FCC's Consumer Center by calling 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) voice or 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322) TTY; faxing 1-866-418-0232; or writing to:

Federal Communications Commission
Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau
Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20554

###

For this or any other consumer publication in an accessible format (electronic ASCII text, Braille, large print or audio), please write or call us at the address or phone number below, or send an email to FCC504@fcc.gov.

This document is for consumer education purposes only and is not intended to affect any proceedings or cases involving this subject matter or related issues.

Last Reviewed 4/1/14