

## **PUC Encourages Awareness of Telephone Discount Lifeline Program to Consumers at Risk of Isolation During Challenging Times**

HARRISBURG – The Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (PUC) today encouraged consumers across the state, especially those most vulnerable to social isolation, to understand the resources available through the Lifeline program to help them stay connected to their voice and internet services during these challenging times.

“Lifeline is intended to help make communications more affordable and more accessible for low-income households, helping them stay connected to information about jobs, family, health care, schools, and emergency services,” said PUC Chairman Gladys Brown Dutrieuille. “Because of the recent COVID-19 emergency, more consumers whose incomes have been reduced may now be eligible to qualify for this program.”

The PUC is partnering with the Department of Aging and other state agencies and community organizations to increase awareness of Lifeline.

“Older Pennsylvanians risk becoming socially isolated during the COVID-19 outbreak. Staying connected and engaged with family and friends is a great opportunity for them to reduce their likelihood of feeling isolated and dealing with related issues like anxiety and depression,” said Pennsylvania Department of Aging Secretary Robert Torres. “With many older adults living on fixed incomes, programs like Lifeline can help them access technology, whether it’s a phone or the internet, that would allow them to keep in touch with loved ones.”

[Lifeline](#) is a federal government benefit that provides eligible low-income consumers a monthly discount on their phone or internet bill. The benefit can be used for voice (telephone), Broadband Internet Access Service (or BIAS, usually called internet service), or a combined telephone/internet service product from a landline or wireless provider.

The [program](#) provides a \$7.25 per household, per month discount on landline or wireless voice service and a \$9.25 per household, per month discount on your wireless or landline internet service. The discount appears in the form of a reduction on the service provider’s bill. A service provider may also offer you the minimum Lifeline Program with no additional charges. The rules and amounts of support can change over time.

A consumer qualifies for Lifeline if they are at or below 135% of the federal poverty guidelines or participate in specific federal programs, including: Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Veterans’ Pension and Survivor Benefit, Federal Public Housing Assistance (FPHA), and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

Consumers or households that apply for Lifeline will be checked to see if they are eligible. After that, they must certify every year that they are eligible for such support. Currently, in response to the public health emergency associated with the coronavirus

COVID-19 pandemic, the Lifeline program's recertification and reverification requirements are waived for 60 days. More information on program eligibility, how to apply and recertify is available on the [Commission's website](#). More information on the federal government's suspension of their Lifeline requirements is available at the [USAC website](#).

The Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission balances the needs of consumers and utilities; ensures safe and reliable utility service at reasonable rates; protects the public interest; educates consumers to make independent and informed utility choices; furthers economic development; and fosters new technologies and competitive markets in an environmentally sound manner.

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