

## Montana Public Service Commission — News Release

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### PSC Urges Montanans to ‘Stay Connected’ with Telephone Assistance

It may be hard to believe, but there are still many people in our state do not have phone service in their homes. Often, this is because they do not have the money to pay for the initial installation or to keep up with monthly bills. The PSC is urging Montanans to “stay connected” by reaching out to those who cannot afford needed phone service. Two programs—Link-Up and Lifeline—are designed to help eligible individuals establish and maintain phone service by offering discounts off both the installation and monthly phone charges for participating companies.

This week has been designated nationally as “Lifeline Awareness Week,” and the PSC is using the opportunity to promote the programs. “We hope that by making more people aware of Lifeline and Link-Up, we can ensure that more consumers can call life-saving services,” said Travis Kavulla, the PSC’s chairman. “The telephone is an important link and, for rural communities and the elderly, sometimes the only link to a social world of family and friends which needs to remain intact.” The Federal Communications Commission estimates that 5 percent of Americans still have no telephone service.

In Montana, those enrolled in Medicaid are automatically eligible for Link-Up and Lifeline for all areas except Tribal lands. Under the Link-Up program, a 50 percent reduction in the telephone service installation charge is provided, up to a maximum of \$30, for most qualifying households that do not currently have telephone service.

Under the Lifeline program, Medicaid recipients who receive phone service from a participating company are eligible to receive discounted basic telephone service; participants often save more than \$13 a month.

On Tribal lands, the eligibility criteria are broader and additional discounts are offered. Exact program details are available from local telephone companies. Additional information is also available at county offices of public assistance, the PSC at 1-800-646-6150, or <http://www.lifeline.gov>.

Made up of 5 elected commissioners, the PSC works to ensure that Montanans receive safe and reliable service from regulated public utilities while paying reasonable rates. Utilities regulated by the PSC generally include private investor owned natural gas, electric, telephone, water, and sewer companies. In addition, the PSC regulates certain motor carriers, and oversees natural gas pipeline safety and intrastate railroad safety.

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