

NEWS RELEASE
MONTANA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
FEBRUARY 25, 2013

CONTACT: Justin Post, (406) 444-6171
PSC Urges Telephone Customers to Verify Lifeline Status

HELENA - A number of Montana telephone customers receiving Lifeline support were surprised in recent weeks to discover an increase in their phone bills after losing the monthly discount.

Although not all Montana Public Service Commissioners are in support of the program, the department as a body nevertheless encourages all Montanans previously enrolled in Lifeline to check their phone bills to determine whether they have lost the discount.

In an effort to curb waste, fraud and abuse, the Federal Communications Commission required those receiving the Lifeline discount to complete a form confirming continued eligibility. More than 6,850 of the 13,184 Montanans enrolled in Lifeline lost the discount either because they were no longer eligible or didn't respond during the recertification process. Those customers are asked to contact their phone carrier to re-establish eligibility.

Eighteen telephone carriers are certified by the PSC to offer Lifeline support in Montana. The carriers said they made efforts to contact the 13,184 customers as part of the recertification. Of those, 6,363 customers responded and only 37 were determined to be no longer eligible for Lifeline.

Another 6,821 did not respond and were automatically de-enrolled from Lifeline. That means 6,858 Montanans, or 52 percent, lost Lifeline support during the recertification process.

Since December, the PSC has received numerous calls from customers who were unaware they needed to recertify. PSC staffers working in the Consumer Assistance program have helped Montanans through the process of seeking to reinstate the discount.

Montana telephone customers previously qualified for Lifeline by receiving Medicaid. The FCC's 2012 Lifeline Reform Order widely expanded eligibility for telephone customers in the Treasure State.

Who Qualifies for Lifeline:

To qualify for the federal discount the consumer must have income below 135 percent of the federal poverty guidelines or participate in one of the following federal assistance programs: Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Supplemental Security Income, federal public housing assistance (Section 8), LIEAP, National School Lunch Program's free lunch program or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. CenturyLink customers receiving Medicaid may qualify for the state Telephone Assistance Program, in addition to the federal Lifeline program.

Additional Lifeline discounts are available on tribal lands. To qualify, the consumer must have income below 135 percent of the federal poverty guidelines or participate in one of the following assistance programs: Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Supplemental Security Income, federal public housing assistance (Section 8), LIEAP, National School Lunch Program's free lunch program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance, Tribally-Administered Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Head Start (only those households meeting its income-qualifying standard) or the Food Distribution Program on reservations.

The Link-Up program is available on tribal lands and provides a 100-percent reduction in the telephone service installation charge, up to \$100, for qualifying households with no telephone service.

For more information about Lifeline and Link-Up, contact your local telephone service provider.