

For Immediate Release
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MINNESOTA CUSTOMERS MUST ACT TO KEEP LIFELINE AND TAP TELEPHONE DISCOUNTS

St. Paul, Minnesota - The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission and the Minnesota Department of Commerce want to make sure that telephone customers are aware that they must act to continue to receive the benefits of certain telephone discount programs they may have been receiving.

Both the Commission and the Department have received numerous inquiries from customers who were removed from Lifeline and Telephone Assistance Plan (TAP) programs and recently saw an increase in their telephone bills. The Commission and Commerce Department have also received reports from local telephone service providers regarding the numbers of customers removed from the telephone discount programs.

The telephone companies are currently implementing new rules issued by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) that require telephone service providers to remove Lifeline customers who fail to re-certify their eligibility for the programs. Results from the 2012 recertification in Minnesota show that 33,000 or 46 percent of about 71,000 Lifeline customers failed to return signed certification forms with required information to their service providers and were subsequently removed from the programs.

“It is critical that all Minnesotans have telephone access in order to keep in touch in today’s changing world and to be able to make contact with needed emergency services,” said Beverly Jones Heydinger, Chair of the Public Utilities Commission. “While it is important to maintain the integrity of the programs by confirming that the benefits are extended only to those who truly qualify, it is also important that those who are eligible receive the assistance they need.”

Lifeline and TAP are federal and state programs that provide discounts for telephone service to eligible customers based on income (at or less than 135 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines), or participation in qualified government programs (e.g., Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), National School Lunch Program, Federal Public Housing Assistance, Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), and others). Lifeline provides up to a \$9.25 discount per month, while TAP provides an additional \$2.50 discount per month. Further discounts are available to qualified residents of tribal lands.

“Lifeline and TAP programs make a big difference in the lives and family budgets of Minnesotans,” said Commerce Commissioner Mike Rothman. Minnesota consumers have been warned of the need to protect their identity, as they should, but in this case the recertification process required that the last four digits of the consumer’s social security number be included on the recertification form. “I urge all consumers who have qualified for the programs in the past to review their phone bills to ensure that these credits are being applied, and to contact their local service provider if the credits do not appear on their bill,” said Rothman. The telephone companies are responsible for providing customers with the recertification form.

The Commission and Commerce Department are concerned that many of the customers who were removed from the programs are still eligible but simply have not submitted the annual application as required by the new federal rules. Telephone customers who are no longer receiving their Lifeline or TAP discounts and believe that they qualify for the discounts based on income or qualified assistance program participation should contact their local telephone service provider and request an application for the Lifeline and TAP programs. Information on how to contact the telephone service provider should be available on the individual customer’s telephone bill.

For More Information

Concerned consumers can call:

The Public Utilities Commission Consumer Affairs Office at 1-800-657-3782 or 651-296-0406

Department of Commerce Telecommunications Division at 651-296-4026 or
telecom.commerce@state.mn.us