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H.216

Introduced by Representatives Pugh of South Burlington and Carr of Brandon

Referred to Committee on

Date:

Subject: Telecommunications; FCC Lifeline program; Vermont Lifeline  
program; eligibility; benefits; wireline voice service

Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to update  
Vermont law pertaining to the federal and State Lifeline programs.

An act relating to establishment of the Vermont Lifeline program

It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

Sec. 1. 30 V.S.A. § 218(c) is amended to read:

(c)(1) The Public Service Board shall take any action, ~~including the setting~~  
~~of telephone rates, enabling~~ necessary to enable the State of Vermont and  
telecommunications companies offering service in Vermont to participate in  
the Federal Communications Commission ~~telephone~~ Lifeline program and the  
Vermont Lifeline program, as described in subdivision (2) of this subsection.  
~~The Board shall set one or more residential basic exchange Lifeline telephone~~  
~~service credits, for those persons eligible to participate in the Federal~~  
~~Communications Commission Lifeline program.~~

1           (2) A person shall be eligible for the Lifeline benefit who meets the  
2 Department for Children and Families means test of eligibility, which shall  
3 include all persons participating in public assistance programs administered by  
4 the Department. The Department for Children and Families shall verify this  
5 eligibility, in compliance with Federal Communications Commission  
6 requirements.

7           (A) The benefit under this subdivision shall be equal to the full  
8 subscriber line charge, plus an amount equal to the larger of:

9           (i) 50 percent of the monthly basic service charge, including 50  
10 percent of all mileage charges and, if the Board determines after notice and  
11 opportunity for hearing that their inclusion will make Lifeline benefits more  
12 comparable in different areas, 50 percent of the usage cost arising from a fixed  
13 amount of monthly local usage; and

14           (ii) \$7.00 per month;

15           (B) provided that in no event shall the amount of the monthly credit  
16 exceed the monthly basic service charge, including any standard usage and  
17 mileage charges who qualifies for participation in the federal Lifeline program  
18 under criteria established by the FCC or other federal law or regulation shall be  
19 eligible to receive a Vermont Lifeline benefit for wireline voice telephone  
20 service. The Vermont Lifeline benefit established under this subdivision shall  
21 be set at an amount not to exceed \$4.25, and shall be applied as a supplement

1 to a wireline voice benefit received through participation in the federal Lifeline  
2 program. However, in no event shall the aggregate amount of the credits  
3 received through the federal and State benefit programs described in this  
4 subdivision exceed the monthly basic service charge, including any standard  
5 usage and mileage charges.

6 (3) ~~A person shall also be eligible for the Lifeline benefit who submits~~  
7 ~~to the Commissioner for Children and Families an application containing any~~  
8 ~~information and disclosure of information authorization necessary to process~~  
9 ~~the Lifeline credit. Such application shall be filed with the Commissioner on~~  
10 ~~or before June 15 of each year and shall be signed by the applicant under the~~  
11 ~~pains and penalties of perjury. A person shall be eligible who is 65 years of~~  
12 ~~age or older whose modified adjusted gross income as defined in 32 V.S.A. §~~  
13 ~~6061(5) for the preceding taxable year was less than 175 percent of the official~~  
14 ~~poverty line established by the federal Department of Health and Human~~  
15 ~~Services for a family of two published as of October 1 of the preceding taxable~~  
16 ~~year. A person shall be eligible whose modified adjusted gross income as~~  
17 ~~defined in 32 V.S.A. § 6061(5) for the preceding taxable year was less than~~  
18 ~~150 percent of the official poverty line established by the federal Department~~  
19 ~~of Health and Human Services for a family of two published as of October 1 of~~  
20 ~~the preceding taxable year. In the case of sickness, absence, disability,~~  
21 ~~excusable neglect, or when, in the judgment of the Secretary of Human~~

1 ~~Services good cause exists, the Secretary may extend the deadline for filing~~  
2 ~~claims under this section. The provisions of 32 V.S.A. § 5901 shall apply to~~  
3 ~~such application. The Secretary of Human Services shall perform income~~  
4 ~~verification. Upon enrollment in the program, and for each period of renewal,~~  
5 ~~such participant shall receive the credit for 12 ensuing months.~~

6 ~~(A) The benefit under this subdivision shall be equal to the full~~  
7 ~~subscriber line charge, plus an amount equal to the larger of:~~

8 ~~(i) 50 percent of the monthly basic service charge, including 50~~  
9 ~~percent of all mileage charges and, if the Board determines after notice and~~  
10 ~~opportunity for hearing that their inclusion will make Lifeline benefits more~~  
11 ~~comparable in different areas, 50 percent of the usage cost arising from a fixed~~  
12 ~~amount of monthly local usage; and~~

13 ~~(ii) \$7.00 per month.~~

14 ~~(B) The amount of the monthly credit pursuant to subdivision (A) of~~  
15 ~~this subdivision (3) shall not exceed the monthly basic service charge,~~  
16 ~~including any standard usage and mileage charges Companies designated as~~  
17 ~~Eligible Telecommunications Carriers by the Board shall verify eligibility for~~  
18 ~~receipt of the Vermont Lifeline benefit in compliance with any applicable~~  
19 ~~federal law or regulation and seek verification of eligibility with the Vermont~~  
20 ~~Agency of Human Services.~~

1           (4) ~~Notwithstanding any provisions of this subsection to the contrary, a~~  
2           ~~subscriber who is enrolled in the Lifeline program and has obtained a final~~  
3           ~~relief from abuse order in accordance with the provisions of 15 V.S.A. chapter~~  
4           ~~21 or 33 V.S.A. chapter 69 shall qualify for a Lifeline benefit credit for the~~  
5           ~~amount of the incremental charges imposed by the local telecommunications~~  
6           ~~company for treating the number of the subscriber as nonpublished and any~~  
7           ~~charges required to change from a published to a nonpublished number. Such~~  
8           ~~subscribers shall be deemed to have good cause by the Secretary of Human~~  
9           ~~Services for the purpose of extending the application deadline in subdivision~~  
10          ~~(3) of this subsection. For purposes of this section, “nonpublished” means that~~  
11          ~~the customer’s telephone number is not listed in any published directories, is~~  
12          ~~not listed on directory assistance records of the company, and is not made~~  
13          ~~available on request by a member of the general public, notwithstanding any~~  
14          ~~claim of emergency a requesting party may present. The Department shall~~  
15          ~~develop an application form and certification process for obtaining this~~  
16          ~~Lifeline benefit credit. Upon enrollment in the program, such participant shall~~  
17          ~~receive the Lifeline benefit credit until the end of the calendar year. Renewals~~  
18          ~~shall be for a period of one year~~ Persons eligible to receive benefits under the  
19          federal Lifeline program shall receive federal benefits pursuant to applicable  
20          federal law and regulations adopted by the FCC.

21           (5) [Repealed.]

- 1      Sec. 2. EFFECTIVE DATE
- 2      This act shall take effect on passage.