



March 25, 2014

Dear Members of the Senate Health and Welfare Committee,

The LifeLine program keeps more than 12,500 low-income older Vermonters connected to essential basic telephone service that enables them to access healthcare providers and stay in touch with friends and family. Making sure that older Vermonters have good access to the LifeLine benefit has always been a priority for AARP and COVE.

As you know, it is more difficult to get older people to enroll in public benefit programs because they are sensitive to being perceived as welfare recipients. When the Vermont General Assembly put the income eligibility determination for LifeLine with the Vermont Department of Taxes it did so to address this concern about being stigmatized and we have always supported that.

Vermont's recent waiver from new federal LifeLine requirements, however, has created a short 5-day window in which the state must notify telecommunications carriers of a LifeLine applicant's eligibility, thus making passage of H.576 necessary. AARP and COVE support the proposed legislation as a necessity. Our support is based on assurances that the Vermont Department of Taxes will continue to distribute LifeLine applications (via tax booklets, to tax preparers, and on the state website), and that the three Departments involved with the LifeLine program – Taxes, Children and Families, and Public Service – will enter into an interagency memorandum that spells out the coordinated functions that each has in relation to the LifeLine program.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on H.576.

Sincerely,

Greg Marchildon, AARP VT State Director

Gini Milkey, COVE