



KNOW YOUR FLORIDA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

Matthew M. Carter II, Commissioner

LINK-UP FLORIDA AND LIFELINE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

In today's information-driven world telephone service has become a necessity rather than a luxury. Modern advances in telecommunications and society's interdependence brought about by those advances require us to be connected to get emergency help, or to link to friends, family, and important services. Unfortunately, some among us have difficulty affording this essential link to the community. However, two programs make getting a telephone and paying for monthly service more affordable for those who need help.

A person may be eligible for the Link-Up Florida and Lifeline Assistance Programs if his or her household income is no more than 135 percent of that in federal poverty guidelines, or if the person participates in any one of the following programs: Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, Federal Public Housing Assistance, Food Stamps, or Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF).

Link-Up Florida reduces initial telephone service hook-up charges by 50 percent, up to a maximum reduction of \$30. So, if a telephone connection charge is \$50, an eligible residential customer would pay only \$25. The Link-Up Florida reduction is available to qualifying households that do not currently have telephone service.

The Lifeline Assistance Program can provide as much as a \$13.50 monthly credit on a qualified residential customer's monthly phone bill. Such a customer would save \$162 per year for local telephone service. If, for example, the telephone bill is \$22, and the full Lifeline credit applies, only \$8.50 is owed by the customer for that bill.

Because many Florida residents find it too expensive to have telephone service, the Legislature has enacted these programs to help make this service more affordable, and has directed the Florida Public Service Commission (PSC) to carry them out. A strong partnership between the Legislature and the PSC, through the Link-Up Florida and Lifeline Assistance Programs, is helping make telephone service affordable to many low-income residents in our state.

However, more needs to be done. In February, the PSC directed its staff to conduct a workshop addressing outreach efforts for the Link-Up and Lifeline Programs, and also directed it to set objectives that will increase enrollment. PSC staff members held the workshop in April, where they worked with stakeholders to identify barriers discouraging or preventing residents from enrolling in these valuable programs. The workshop identified several options for increasing program awareness. Staff is currently evaluating these options and will present a proposal for the Commission to consider.

As a Commissioner, I urge you to take advantage of these programs if you qualify, or to pass the word to a person who might qualify if you do not. Also, please partner with us to spread the word about Link-Up Florida and the Lifeline Assistance Program. If you have any questions about partnering opportunities, or if you would like to know if you are eligible to participate in these programs, please call your local telephone company, or call the PSC at **1-800-342-3552**, and request copies of our Link-Up Florida and Lifeline Assistance Program brochures (available in English, Spanish, and Creole), or visit our Web site at www.floridapsc.com.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q. Who is eligible for Link-Up Florida and the Lifeline Assistance Program?

A. You may be eligible for savings if:

- You participate in and are receiving benefits under one of these programs:
 - ◆ Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
 - ◆ Food Stamps
 - ◆ Medicaid
 - ◆ Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)
 - ◆ Supplemental Security Income
 - ◆ Federal Public Housing
 - ◆ BellSouth, Sprint, and Verizon customers participating in the National School Lunch Free Lunch Program (NSL)
 - ◆ Bureau of Indian Affairs Program (Tribal TANF, Head Start Subsidy, NSL)

OR

- Your household income is at or below 135% of the federal poverty guidelines, but you do not participate in any of the programs listed above. Contact the Office of Public Counsel in Tallahassee at 1-800-540-7039, or your local phone company, to see if you are eligible.

Q. Can I apply even if I have previous unpaid phone bills or can't afford a deposit?

A. Yes. The telephone company will work with you to make payment arrangements so you can pay the outstanding local portion of your bill over a period of at least four months. Also, if you agree to have your long distance service blocked, the company cannot require a deposit.

Q. Can I participate in both programs?

A. Yes.