



An Important Message from the Massachusetts Department of Telecommunications and Cable Regarding Changes to the Federal Government's Lifeline Program for Affordable Communications

Dear Council on Aging Directors and Senior Center Staff:

On behalf of the Massachusetts Department of Telecommunications and Cable, I am writing today to make sure you are aware of the significant reforms the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has made to the Lifeline Program as well as the potential impact to Massachusetts seniors that regularly interact with your agency. The Department has identified your organization as a gateway to our senior community and one of the best channels for educating existing and potential Lifeline program participants about these important changes.

For those of you who may not be familiar with it, since 1985 the Lifeline Program has provided a discount on telephone service for qualifying low-income households as a way to help our most vulnerable consumers stay connected to the nation's communications networks. Recognizing the vast changes in the way people communicate in today's technological climate, the FCC has expanded the Lifeline Program's service offerings to include internet access as of **December 2, 2016**. Internet access will be available in various forms and we anticipate its inclusion in the Lifeline Program will further help connect low-income families to the internet, closing the "homework gap," and eliminating the distance to meaningful employment and reliable healthcare.

In order to be eligible to participate in the Lifeline program, a household's income must either be at or below 135% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines *or* a member of the household must participate in one of the following federal government assistance programs:

- Medicaid (MassHealth);
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as Food Stamps);
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI);
- Federal Public Housing Assistance (Section 8);
- Certain Federally-Recognized/State Tribal Assistance Programs; or
- **NEW**—Veteran's Pension or Survivor's Pension benefit

As part of the FCC's recent program changes in an effort to streamline eligibility criteria, households ***can no longer use*** Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), or the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) as a way to demonstrate their eligibility for the program.

Please note: Households that are currently enrolled in the Lifeline Program due to their participation in these assistance programs will remain active in the program until they are required to recertify their eligibility in 2017. At that time, if a household no longer qualifies under the current program eligibility criteria, it will lose its Lifeline service.

The Department is available to assist in the resolution of any problems that your staff or clients may encounter when attempting to enroll in the Lifeline Program. Please feel free to contact our Consumer Hotline during normal business hours at 1-800-392-6066.

I have attached for your review the Department's Lifeline Program Guide. Please feel free to share this document with members of your network. Additional information about the Lifeline Program is also available on our website at www.mass.gov/dtc. If you would like more information about the Lifeline Program changes, or would like to schedule a presentation at your Senior Center, please do not hesitate to reach out us. You may also complete our speaker request form located here: <http://www.mass.gov/ocabr/government/oca-agencies/dtc-lp/consumer-dtc/dtc-speaker-request.html>.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation sharing this information to be sure no Lifeline-eligible household is left behind.

Sincerely,

Joslyn Day, Director
Consumer Division