



# COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

## Department of Telecommunications and Cable

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## ***Lifeline Program: What Consumers Should Know***

### **What is the Lifeline Program?**

Lifeline is a federal/state government benefit program that permits eligible low-income consumers to receive discounted telecommunications service to help ensure they can connect to the nation's communications networks, find jobs, access health care services and connect with family and their children's schools.

### **2016 Lifeline Modernization Order Changes**

Recognizing the need to stay connected in today's technological climate, the Lifeline Program has expanded its service offerings to include, where available, broadband internet access. Internet access will be available in various forms, but we anticipate its inclusion in the program will help connect low-income consumers to the internet, closing the "homework gap," and eliminating the distance to meaningful employment and reliable healthcare. See additional program changes indicated in **red**.

### **What Benefits are Available from the Lifeline Program?**

Today, Lifeline participants may choose to apply their Lifeline benefit in order to receive a monthly discount on one telephone service—*either landline or wireless*—per household. For landline telephone service, the discount ranges between \$10.00 and \$20.00 per month on basic calling plans. For wireless telephone service, participants may be able to receive one free wireless phone, with a monthly allotment of talking minutes.

**Starting on December 2, 2016, Lifeline Program consumers will have the choice (where available) of applying their benefit to *one* type of service offering:**

- Fixed or mobile broadband internet; or
- Landline or mobile voice service.

**Some carriers may offer bundled package of landline or mobile telephone service and broadband.**

**In addition, the 2016 Lifeline Modernization Order established minimum service standards to ensure that supported services keep pace with the ever-changing digital landscape. Minimum service standards will be evaluated each year to ensure the continued support of robust and meaningful broadband connectivity.**

The chart below outlines the minimum service standards taking effect on December 2, 2016:

Mobile Voice	Mobile Broadband	Fixed Broadband
Usage Allowance: 500 Minutes	Speed: 3G Usage Allowance: 500 MB	Speed: 10/1 Mbps Usage Allowance: 150 GB

## Who is Eligible for the Lifeline Program?

To participate in the Lifeline program, subscribers must either have an income that is at or below 135% of the federal Poverty Guidelines *or* participate in one of the following assistance programs:

- Emergency Aid to Elderly, Disabled and Children (EAEDC)
- Fuel Assistance (Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program or LIHEAP)
- Medicaid (MassHealth)
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as Food Stamps)
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC)
- Federal Public Housing Assistance (Section 8)
- National School Lunch Program (free meals program only)
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
- Certain Federally-Recognized/State Tribal Assistance Programs

On December 2, 2016, only consumers or households that qualify for and receive one of the below benefits will be eligible for enrollment in the Lifeline Program:

- 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
- **NEW**—*Veteran's Pension or Survivor's Pension benefit*

In addition, a household is eligible for Lifeline if the total household income is at or below certain levels, depending on the size of the household. Each year the income eligibility requirements for the Lifeline program offered in Massachusetts may change. *For 2016, the income guidelines are as follows:*

Persons in Household	Annual Income
1	\$16,038
2	\$21,627
3	\$27,216
4	\$32,805
5	\$38,394
6	\$43,983
7	\$49,586
8	\$55,202
For each additional person, add	\$5,616

## Which Service Providers Participate in the Lifeline Program?

<i>Landline Providers</i>	<i>Wireless Providers</i>
<b>Verizon</b> Call 1-800-837-4966 or visit <a href="http://www.verizon.com/lifeline">www.verizon.com/lifeline</a>	<b>Assurance Wireless</b> (also known as Virgin Mobile/Sprint) Call 1-888-898-4888 or visit <a href="http://www.assurancewireless.com">www.assurancewireless.com</a>
<b>Granby Telephone Company</b> (also known as OTT Communications) Call 1-413-467-9911 or visit <a href="http://www.gogtt.net">www.gogtt.net</a>	<b>Budget Mobile</b> Call 1-888-777-4007 or visit <a href="http://www.budgetmobile.com">www.budgetmobile.com</a>
<b>Richmond Telephone</b> Call 1-413-698-2255 or visit <a href="http://www.richmondtelephone.com">www.richmondtelephone.com</a>	<b>SafeLink Wireless</b> (also known as TracFone Wireless) Call 1-800-723-3546 or visit <a href="http://www.safelinkwireless.com">www.safelinkwireless.com</a>
<b>Taconic Telephone</b> (also known as Fairpoint Communications) Call 1-877-524-8293 or visit <a href="http://www.fairpoint.com">www.fairpoint.com</a>	<b>StandUP Wireless</b> (also known as Global Connection) Call 1-877-511-3009 or visit <a href="http://www.standupwireless.com">www.standupwireless.com</a>

You must directly contact an approved Massachusetts Lifeline telephone carrier to learn about their application process. You may be able to complete the application process online, by telephone or by mail. Federal rules require that all Lifeline service providers securely retain copies of your eligibility documentation received during program enrollment for dispute resolution purposes as long as your Lifeline benefit is active.

### Will I be required to recertify my eligibility?

**Yes, once you are enrolled in the Lifeline program, you must verify your continued eligibility on an annual basis.** You will be contacted by your Lifeline provider or the Universal Service Administration Company (USAC) to recertify that you remain eligible. You must respond to this request within 30 days. If you don't recertify your eligibility, you will lose your Lifeline benefit. If your Lifeline provider determines that you are no longer eligible for Lifeline, it will notify you via letter and your Lifeline service will be terminated 30 days after the date of such letter, unless you provide proof of eligibility. If you become ineligible for the Lifeline benefit for any reason, you *must contact your provider immediately to de-enroll* from the program or you may be subject to penalties.

You may recertify your eligibility in 2016 according to the current eligibility criteria, but will be required to recertify in 2017 using the new eligibility criteria that goes into effect on December 2, 2016. During the 2017 recertification cycle, you will now have 60 days to recertify your eligibility.

## Accessible Devices

For consumers who require an accessible device, there are options available.

To apply for financial assistance in obtaining a handset compatible with your landline telephone service provider, you may contact the Massachusetts Commission of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Assistive Technology Fund at 617-740-1600 or contact Alexander Pooler, the Director of the Assistive Technology Program at the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind, by email at [Alexander.Pooler@state.ma.us](mailto:Alexander.Pooler@state.ma.us).

To request an accessible wireless device, contact your wireless carrier of choice to explore what models are available to suit your needs. Braille key, larger-screen and hearing aid compatible mobile phones may also be available upon request.

## Important Consumer Tips and Recent Program Changes

- Applicants must choose Lifeline service for either their landline or wireless service, but cannot obtain both services. Only one individual in a household may receive Lifeline Service. *Federal law limits the Lifeline benefit to one service per household.*
- Applicants will be required to complete an application for the carrier of their choice that certifies that they meet the eligibility requirements. This will also include submitting acceptable documentation, along with a completed application, to demonstrate proof of eligibility for the program.
- Applicants must recertify each year with their Lifeline provider to certify that they continue to meet eligibility requirements or they may lose their Lifeline discount. When your Lifeline provider or the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) notifies you to recertify your continued eligibility for Lifeline, you must respond promptly, as failing to respond will result in a removal of your benefit or suspension of service.
- Participating in the Lifeline Program does not protect you from being disconnected if you fail to pay your telephone bill.
- Depending on your location, some wireless carriers may provide a better signal than others. Contact each company to find out which provides the most coverage in your area prior to selecting a carrier.
- When submitting your Lifeline application to your service provider, be sure your answers are complete and legible and that you provide a photocopy of your proof of eligibility documents.
- Keep a copy of your completed application and all original eligibility documentation for your records.
- **Effective December 2, 2016, you must use your Lifeline service once every 30 days or your benefit will be removed. Sending a text message now qualifies as usage of service.**
- **Once enrolled, you must stay with the same Lifeline provider for 60 days for telephone service and 12 months for broadband service before being able to switch providers.**

## **We are here to Help!**

For additional information regarding the Lifeline program, contact the Consumer Division of the Massachusetts Department of Telecommunications and Cable. The Consumer Division also accepts complaints concerning Lifeline service and works directly with service providers to resolve any issues that program participants may encounter.

**Visit or Write:** Consumer Division, Department of Telecommunications and Cable, 1000 Washington Street, Suite 820, Boston, MA 02118

**Call:** 1-800-392-6066 (Our Consumer Hotline operates Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm)

**Fax:** 617-988-8288

**Email:** [consumer.complaints@state.ma.us](mailto:consumer.complaints@state.ma.us)

**Web:** [www.mass.gov/dtc](http://www.mass.gov/dtc)

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