



**COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION
P.O. BOX 3265, HARRISBURG, PA 17105-3265**

Nov. 2, 2016

Dear CEO:

The purpose of this letter is to enlist your support in educating Pennsylvania consumers about changes in the federal Lifeline telephone assistance program, which enhances opportunities for low-income households to connect to voice and Broadband Internet Access Service (BIAS), commonly referred to as internet service. Lifeline helps nearly a half-million Pennsylvania households stay connected to information about work, school, healthcare, social programs, and other vital services, and it is important that consumers understand the new choices available to them, as well as changes in the eligibility criteria.

As outlined in the FCC's 2016 Lifeline Modernization Order, a number of changes will become effective over the next five years, starting on Dec. 1, 2016. Most notably, the list of assistance programs used to qualify for Lifeline has been streamlined to the following: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Federal Public Housing Assistance, and Veteran's Pension or Survivor's Pension benefits. Consumers who currently receive Lifeline through other programs will continue to be eligible under those programs, but only until July 1, 2017. After that, they will be eligible only under the streamlined list of programs.

Equally important, while the list of eligible programs has been streamlined, consumers can also still qualify for enrollment in Lifeline based on their income. Consumers at or below 135 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines will continue to be eligible for Lifeline.

The Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission is working to educate the public and other state agencies about these important changes in the Lifeline program, along with the new opportunities for obtaining Lifeline support for BIAS. We encourage you to develop an outreach plan and also arm your call center representatives with information on the changes so they can address any consumer questions and resolve any consumer issues in a timely manner. This includes questions or issues where the provision of bundled voice and BIAS services is involved. We also encourage you to be flexible as consumers learn about the changes to the Lifeline Program.

In an effort to connect as many eligible consumers as possible, and keep them connected, we ask that you assist us in getting the message out about Lifeline changes; alert us to any concerns that you may be encountering from consumers during the transition; and, identify points of confusion that your consumers may be experiencing. To support this important work, we ask that your Company, in its capacity as a Lifeline Eligible Telecommunications Carrier in Pennsylvania, please respond to this letter with information about your Company's outreach and education plans; any focused efforts to reach current subscribers about program and eligibility changes; and details regarding any additional discounts or promotional programs that you intend to offer (including broadband modems, upgrades to "smart" phones, data plans and other related services). Please apprise us of any substantial changes in your own outreach efforts as well.

Please inform the Commission by Nov. 18, 2016, of your Company's outreach plan as part of our combined effort to educate consumers about the Lifeline Program and its changes. Send your comments to Sandra Johnson-Gumby in the Commission's Bureau of Consumer Services at sjohnson-g@pa.gov. Thank you for your cooperation. We look forward to working together to help the public understand the impact of these changes. For reference, the case docket number is M-2016-2566383.

Sincerely,

Gladys M. Brown
Chairman

Andrew G. Place
Vice Chairman

John F. Coleman Jr.
Commissioner

Robert F. Powelson
Commissioner

David W. Sweet
Commissioner