

CHAPTER 2022-80

Senate Bill No. 7036

An act relating to Lifeline telecommunications service; amending s. 364.10, F.S.; requiring a Lifeline service subscriber to present proof of continued eligibility to certain entities upon request; deleting provisions authorizing certain local exchange telecommunications companies and commercial mobile radio service providers to provide Lifeline service to customers who meet certain income requirements; revising the entities required to cooperate in the development of procedures for promoting the Lifeline service; authorizing certain participant information to be exchanged with the Federal Communications Commission or its designee; revising requirements for state agencies to coordinate with the commission or its designee and verify participant eligibility in Lifeline qualifying programs; deleting provisions requiring certain entities to form a Lifeline Workgroup for sharing subscriber information; amending s. 364.107, F.S.; authorizing the release of certain confidential and exempt Lifeline Assistance Plan participant information to the commission or its designee for specified purposes; providing an effective date.

Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

Section 1. Paragraphs (e) and (f) of subsection (1) and subsection (2) of section 364.10, Florida Statutes, are amended to read:

364.10 Lifeline service.—

(1)

(e)1. An eligible telecommunications carrier must notify a Lifeline subscriber of impending termination of Lifeline service if the company has a reasonable basis for believing that the subscriber no longer qualifies for the service. Notification of pending termination must be in the form of a letter that is separate from the subscriber's bill.

2. ~~An eligible telecommunications carrier shall allow a subscriber 60 days following the date of the pending termination letter to demonstrate continued eligibility.~~ The subscriber must present proof of continued eligibility upon request of the eligible telecommunications carrier, or the Federal Communications Commission or its designee. An eligible telecommunications carrier may transfer a subscriber off of Lifeline service, pursuant to its tariff, if the subscriber fails to demonstrate continued eligibility.

3. The commission shall establish procedures for such notification and termination.

(f) An eligible telecommunications carrier shall timely credit a consumer's bill with the Lifeline Assistance credit as soon as practicable, but no

later than 60 days following receipt of notice of eligibility from the Office of Public Counsel or proof of eligibility from the consumer.

~~(2)(a) Each local exchange telecommunications company that has more than 1 million access lines and that is designated as an eligible telecommunications carrier shall, and any commercial mobile radio service provider designated as an eligible telecommunications carrier pursuant to 47 U.S.C. s. 214(c) may, upon filing a notice of election to do so with the commission, provide Lifeline service to any otherwise eligible customer or potential customer who meets an income eligibility test at 150 percent or less of the federal poverty income guidelines for Lifeline customers. Such a test for eligibility must augment, rather than replace, the eligibility standards established by federal law and based on participation in certain low-income assistance programs. Each intrastate interexchange telecommunications company shall file or publish a schedule providing at a minimum the intrastate interexchange telecommunications company's current Lifeline benefits and exemptions to Lifeline customers who meet the income eligibility test set forth in this subsection. The Office of Public Counsel shall certify and maintain claims submitted by a customer for eligibility under the income test authorized by this subsection.~~

~~(b) Each eligible telecommunications carrier subject to this subsection shall provide to each state and federal agency providing benefits to persons eligible for Lifeline service applications, brochures, pamphlets, or other materials that inform the persons of their eligibility for Lifeline, and each state agency providing the benefits shall furnish the materials to affected persons at the time they apply for benefits.~~

~~(b)(e) An eligible telecommunications carrier may not discontinue basic local telecommunications service to a subscriber who receives Lifeline service because of nonpayment by the subscriber of charges for nonbasic services billed by the telecommunications company, including long-distance service. A subscriber who receives Lifeline service shall pay all applicable basic local telecommunications service fees, including the subscriber line charge, E-911, telephone relay system charges, and applicable state and federal taxes.~~

~~(c)(d) An eligible telecommunications carrier may not refuse to connect, reconnect, or provide Lifeline service because of unpaid toll charges or nonbasic charges other than basic local telecommunications service.~~

~~(d)(e) An eligible telecommunications carrier may require that payment arrangements be made for outstanding debt associated with basic local telecommunications service, subscriber line charges, E-911, telephone relay system charges, and applicable state and federal taxes.~~

~~(e)(f) An eligible telecommunications carrier may block a Lifeline service subscriber's access to all long-distance service, except for toll-free numbers, and may block the ability to accept collect calls if when the subscriber owes an outstanding amount for long-distance service or amounts resulting from~~

collect calls. However, the eligible telecommunications carrier may not impose a charge for blocking long-distance service. The eligible telecommunications carrier shall remove the block at the request of the subscriber without additional cost to the subscriber upon payment of the outstanding amount. An eligible telecommunications carrier may charge a service deposit before removing the block.

~~(f)1.(g)1.~~ Each state agency that provides benefits to persons eligible for Lifeline service shall undertake, in cooperation with the Department of Children and Families, ~~the Department of Education, the commission, the Office of Public Counsel, and telecommunications companies designated~~ eligible telecommunications carriers providing Lifeline services, the development of procedures to promote Lifeline participation. ~~The department and departments, the commission, and the Office of Public Counsel may~~ exchange sufficient information with the appropriate eligible telecommunications carriers, ~~or the Federal Communications Commission or its designee and any commercial mobile radio service provider electing to provide Lifeline service under paragraph (a),~~ such as a person's name, date of birth, service address, and telephone number, so that eligible customers ~~the carriers can be enrolled~~ identify and enroll an eligible person in the Lifeline and Link-Up programs. The information remains confidential and exempt pursuant to s. 364.107 and may only be used for purposes of determining eligibility and enrollment in the Lifeline and Link-Up programs.

2. If any state agency determines that a person is eligible for a Lifeline qualifying program ~~services~~, the agency must coordinate with the Federal Communications Commission or its designee to verify eligibility for the Lifeline service ~~shall immediately forward the information to the commission to ensure that the person is automatically enrolled in the program with the appropriate eligible telecommunications carrier. The state agency shall include an option for an eligible customer to choose not to subscribe to the Lifeline service. The Public Service Commission and the Department of Children and Families shall adopt rules creating procedures to automatically enroll eligible customers in Lifeline service.~~

~~3.~~ ~~The commission, the Department of Children and Families, the Office of Public Counsel, and each eligible telecommunications carrier offering Lifeline and Link-Up services shall convene a Lifeline Workgroup to discuss how the eligible subscriber information in subparagraph 1. will be shared, the obligations of each party with respect to the use of that information, and the procedures to be implemented to increase enrollment and verify eligibility in these programs.~~

~~(g)(h)~~ The commission shall report to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives by December 31 of each year on the number of customers who are subscribing to Lifeline service and the effectiveness of any procedures to promote participation.

(h)(i) The commission may undertake appropriate measures to inform low-income consumers of the availability of the Lifeline and Link-Up programs.

(i)(j) The commission shall adopt rules to administer this section.

Section 2. Subsection (2) of section 364.107, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

364.107 Public records exemption; Lifeline Assistance Plan participants.

(2) Information made confidential and exempt under subsection (1) may be released to the applicable telecommunications carrier, or to the Federal Communications Commission or its designee, for purposes directly connected with eligibility for, verification related to, or auditing of a Lifeline Assistance Plan.

Section 3. This act shall take effect July 1, 2022.

Approved by the Governor April 27, 2022.

Filed in Office Secretary of State April 27, 2022.