

News Release

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Contact: Rob Hillesland
(515) 281-3551
rob.hillesland@iub.state.ia.us
Iowa Utilities Board

Jerry McKim
(515) 281-0859
jerry.mckim@dhr.state.ia.us
Iowa Department of Human Rights

State Agencies Work Together to Increase Telephone Assistance Program Participation and Funding

A cooperative effort of the Iowa Utilities Board (IUB) and Iowa Department of Human Rights (IDHR) is dramatically increasing the number of low-income lowans receiving federal assistance for basic telephone service. For the first time, many low-income lowans are being certified for the Lifeline telephone assistance program through the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) certification process.

Customers eligible for LIHEAP are also eligible for Lifeline assistance. IDHR certified more than 75,000 Iowa households for LIHEAP last year. Starting this year, low-income lowans may also qualify for Lifeline assistance when becoming certified for LIHEAP, which has an October 1 to April 15 application period. In just the first six weeks of the current application period, approximately 16,000 Iowa households have concurrently been certified for LIHEAP and Lifeline. The total number of Lifeline certifications last year was 13,884 and 11,832 the previous year.

"We're anticipating approximately 40,000 to 50,000 may ultimately sign up for the Lifeline benefit as a result of this," said Jerry McKim, Chief of the Bureau of Energy Assistance. "That would mean about \$4 million annually in additional federal assistance funds for lowans."

Getting Lifeline dollars to qualified lowans provides them with a monthly phone bill credit of \$6.47 or \$7.75 (depending upon service provider). It enables them to have phone service while saving money for other important things like food, prescriptions, and energy bills. The Federal Communications Commission requires a nationwide universal service charge on phone bills to support Lifeline and many other programs that ensure affordable access to telecommunications services. Iowa's increased Lifeline participation will have no impact upon the state budget.

"In this case, state government determined a good way to access more federal dollars to the advantage of lowans," said IUB Chairman Diane Munns. "This is just another way to become certified. Customers not applying for Lifeline assistance through LIHEAP may still apply in the traditional manner through their local telephone company."

Lowans are also eligible for telephone assistance if they participate in at least one of the following: Medicaid, Food Stamps, Supplemental Security Income, or Federal Public Housing Assistance. Application forms can be obtained from local telephone companies, county offices of the Department of Human Services, the Area Agency on Aging, and the Community Action Program offices of the IDHR. This application is also available on the Iowa Utilities Board web site at www.state.ia.us/iub. Applicants should submit an application to their local telephone company.

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