



Department of Human Resources
311 West Saratoga Street
Baltimore MD 21201

Family Investment Administration INFORMATION MEMO

Control Number: #10-32

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TO: DIRECTORS AND FAMILY INVESTMENT ASSISTANT DIRECTORS

FROM: KEVIN M. MCGUIRE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

RE: TELEPHONE LIFELINE (TEL-LIFE) PROGRAM

PROGRAMS AFFECTED: TEL-LIFE

ORIGINATING OFFICE: OHEP STATE OFFICE

SUMMARY: This purpose of this transmittal is to provide information regarding the Telephone Lifeline Program or Tel-Life in Maryland. Tel-Life is a program that offers low-cost telephone service to eligible low-income individuals. Telephone Lifeline Service in Maryland is authorized by the Public Utility Companies Article, Title 8, Subtitle 2, Section 8-201.

The Lifeline program, however, is nationwide. Lifeline is a federal program created by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in 1984 and enhanced by the Telecommunications Act of 1996. The FCC's Low Income Program of the Universal Service Fund, which is administered by the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC), is designed to ensure that quality telecommunications services are available to low-income customers at just, reasonable, and affordable rates. Lifeline support reduces monthly charges for basic telephone service for eligible low-income consumers.

The funding is administered by the Universal Service Administrative Corporation (USAC). USAC administers the telecommunications universal service fund providing communities across America with affordable telecommunication services. The fund is comprised of fees collected from customers and paid to USAC by telecommunication companies. Companies participating in Lifeline programs are reimbursed by USAC for some costs associated with the program.

ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible for Tel-Life service an applicant must participate in at least one of the following programs offered by the Department of Human Resources (DHR):

- **Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA)**
- **Temporary Disability to Adults (TDAP)**
- **Food Supplement Program (FSP)**
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- **Supplemental Security Income (SSI)**
- **Public Assistance to Adults (PAA)**
- **Medical Assistance (MA)**
- **Electric Universal Service Program (EUSP)**
- **Maryland Energy Assistance Program (MEAP)**

The customer may only have one Lifeline account. Customers are not eligible to have both landline and cell phone accounts.

APPLICATION INFORMATION:

Application for Tel-Life service is directly through the telephone company. DHR does not take the application. When customers inquire about Tel-Life they should be referred to the following companies that are currently authorized to offer Telephone Lifeline Service in Maryland.

Verizon:

Customers must apply by contacting Verizon at 1-800-525-0145.

Verizon offers only land-based phone service under Tel-Life. Verizon Wireless service is not currently available in Maryland under the Tel-Life program.

1. Basic Tel-Life: One residential local telephone access line at \$.66 per month including the first 30 outgoing local calls per billing month. The cost of calls beyond the limit of 30 is \$.10 per call. No premium services are allowed. There are no connection charges.
2. Enhanced Tel-Life: One residential local telephone access line plus unlimited calls per billing month for a monthly fee of \$10.00. Up to two premium services can be added at existing rates. Additional outlets are eligible for a 50% discount on the regular installation charge.

Safelink Wireless:

Applications are accepted online at www.safelinkwireless.com or by calling 1-800-977-3768. Safelink's application process is automated either through a web-based application or a telephone Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system.

Applicants must have a valid United States Postal address in order for a phone to be shipped to their residence. Post Office Boxes cannot be accepted.

Safelink Wireless is a branch of TracFone and offers only cell service. Safelink offers a free cell phone selected by the company plus 64 free minutes of calling time. Unused minutes from the initial 64 minutes are rolled over to the next month.

Additional minutes may be purchased at a discount from a retail store (such as Walmart, Target, Radio Shack, Office Depot, Staples, 7-11, Amazon and Yahoo!) offering TracFone or Safelink phone cards or online at www.safelinkwireless.com. For example, a card with 60 minutes of time costs \$19.99, but when purchased and activated by a Safelink customer the minutes are automatically increased to 100 minutes.

Nationsline:

Customers must apply by contacting Nationsline at 1-866-262-4114.

Nationsline offers a land line only for a reduced monthly rate for unlimited calls. Contact Nationsline for details.

Cricket:

Customers must complete a Cricket Lifeline application form and submit documentation of participation in one of the eligible programs listed above to a Cricket retail location. Application forms are available at Cricket stores and on the Cricket website.

Cricket offers a monthly credit of up to \$13.50 for wireless service through the Lifeline Assistance program. The credit can be applied to any single Cricket Wireless rate plan. It may not be applied to a Cricket Broadband or Cricket PAYGo account. Additionally, subscribers are eligible for a one-time 50% discount on the activation fee if new to Cricket or new within the past 60 days.

Additional information about Cricket plans may be obtained visiting a Cricket store, calling 1-800-975-3708 or visiting www.mycricket.com.

DHR RESPONSIBILITY:

DHR is responsible for verifying the eligibility of customers applying for Tel-Life service. To do this DHR requires a signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with each participating telephone company. Currently, MOUs are in place with Verizon, TracFone (Safelink Wireless) and Nationsline.

DHR provides eligibility information via a data file provided on a monthly basis to each of the companies for which the MOU is in place. The data file is provided to the companies through a secure file transfer protocol (SFTP). The data includes the customer's name, address, last 4 digits of the social security number and birth date.

Because the data file is monthly, there may be occasion where an eligible person may not appear on the list. For these situations, a separate process is in place to verify eligibility.

Local Departments of Social Services (LDSS) are not responsible for providing eligibility information to participating companies.

In the event customers contact the LDSS with questions, particularly about eligibility or being denied, the LDSS should direct the customer to call the DHR information line at 1-800-332-6347. The Call Center has received instructions on the handling of these calls.

As of the issuance of this transmittal, the generated eligible list does not contain all the required information. This has resulted in a higher than normal number of inquiries. Work is under way to correct this situation.

COORDINATING OFFICE:

For DHR, the office responsible for Tel-Life is the Family Investment Administration/Office of Home Energy Programs. OHEP may be contacted by calling 410-767-7415 or 410-767-7443.

MISCELLANEOUS:

Local Departments of Social Services and other agencies may have old Tel-Life applications in their offices. These applications should be destroyed as they are no longer accepted.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Additional information may be obtained from the USAC website at www.usac.org or www.lifelinesupport.org.

INQUIRIES: Please direct questions to Ralph N. Markus at (410) 767-7415.

cc: DHR Expanded Executive Staff
FIA Management Staff
Constituent Services
OTHS Help Desk
Office of the Peoples' Counsel
Public Service Commission – Office of External Affairs